

To my mother and father

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G. G. F.
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Introduction

This study examines a critical period of modern German history through the career and ideas of Houston Stewart Chamberlain. An Englishman by birth, he became a German by choice and left his mark on the development of popular racism and on the history of Bayreuth and Wagnerism. From the early 1890s until the 1920s he produced a steady stream of books and articles on religion, science, art, philosophy, and race that won him widespread fame and the friendship of Kaiser Wilhelm and Hitler. Both a critic and a boundless admirer of Germany, Chamberlain felt the pulse of his adopted land often with an uncanny accuracy; he voiced fears about the values and goals of German society, glorified the spiritual and cultural mission of Germans in the modern world, and suffered with other nationalist contemporaries the bitter disappointments of World War I and the destruction of the Wilhelminian Reich. His life and writings attest to the prominence of racialism and anti-Semitic thinking in German political culture before the fascist era and contribute to our understanding of the social and intellectual context of such prejudice.

Today Chamberlain is largely remembered as an intellectual precursor of Nazism. Alfred Rosenberg, the principal ideologue of National Socialism in its early days, hailed him as a pioneer and spiritual forerunner and viewed himself as Chamberlain's true successor. Konrad Heiden, Hitler's first biographer and a vocal opponent of the Fascist regime, por-

trayed this converted Englishman as “one of the most astonishing talents in the history of the German mind” and a man who “exerted a decisive influence on two generations of German intellectuals.”¹ In the years after 1933, Nazi publicists—eager to demonstrate that the regime possessed deep and authentic roots in the German intellectual tradition—made him the subject of numerous essays, speeches, radio programs and books, while doctoral students took aspects of his work for their dissertations. But it is misleading to depict Chamberlain—as did so many of the early accounts of his life—as a racist prophet on the periphery of society, toiling without due recognition of his talents and significance until the National Socialist “revolution.” His major books were completed before the First World War and belong to the cultural milieu of Wilhelminian rather than Weimar Germany; his greatest success came as early as 1899 with the publication of *Die Grundlagen des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts* [*The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*].

Unlike Lagarde, Chamberlain was not an “outsider” who lashed out against the values and institutions of the Imperial Reich and harbored a deep pessimism about the future. His “Hymn to Germanism,” as the Kaiser called the *Foundations*, though critical, nostalgic, and ambivalent toward many aspects of modernity, was prompted not by a mood of cultural despair but one of general optimism and faith in the further expansion of German power and prestige in the world. It was not to the anticapitalist agrarians or the depressed strata of the petty bourgeoisie that Chamberlain addressed his message, but to the nationalist middle classes; his tone captured their buoyant spirit as well as their nagging fears of moral decline. Thus, it is against the backdrop of Wilhelminian *Weltpolitik* that Chamberlain’s views must first be examined. By 1914 he was already 59 years old and his basic outlook was already fixed: the latter parts of this study reveal how his cultural and political vision was further shaped by the combined impact of the war, the fall of the Hohenzollern monarchy, and the discord of early Weimar.

The organization of the book is largely chronological, al

though on occasions I have departed from this to explain and analyze more fully some aspect of Chamberlain's thought. His life falls into three fairly distinct phases. The first runs from his birth in 1855 into an upper class English family with strong military and imperial traditions until the time he discovered his vocation as a writer. Its central theme is his education, meant in its broadest sense: the formation of his ideas about society and aesthetics, the range of his interests and erudition, and his gradual assumption of a cogent cultural and political stance—shaped by the interplay of personal experience and the larger shifts in society and attitudes that overwhelmed Europe in the second half of the nineteenth century. The Europe of 1850 was by 1890 transformed in the scale of industrial capitalism, and in the balance of power between the individual states. Germany had become the dominant nation of the Continent and Chamberlain, like many others, was captivated by the art, culture, science, and philosophy of this emergent giant.

The second part of the book focusses on Chamberlain as a writer and publicist. He was one of the most successful exemplars of a new literary type: the popular synthesizer who, in an age of specialization, dispensed with academic caution and strove to impose an order on the chaos of experience by drawing together all his knowledge in an easily grasped unified vision. He was one of several bold diagnosticians who rose to prominence in the 1890s coinciding with a general spirit of self questioning among Germans. It was in the cause of Wagnerism that he served his literary apprenticeship; defending Cosima Wagner's management of the festivals at Bayreuth, publicizing the Master's aesthetic philosophy of redemption, and berating its critics, Chamberlain honed his literary style into a fine instrument of persuasion. Over the years he probably did more to acquaint the reading public with Wagnerite ideas than any other individual.

"I feel strongly out of place here" commented Mark Twain on a visit to the Bayreuth festival of 1891.² Max Nordau described the scenes of religious and aesthetic intoxication as a yardstick of "the breadth and depth of the degeneration and hysteria of our time."³ Even Lord Redesdale, Chamberlain's

English translator, on a first visit in 1912, was bewildered by the intense devotional tone of this theatrical ritual. He was puzzled by these "minds that the great poet holds in the thrall of his genius" and recalled how "with the silence of conviction they accept his preaching: the early Christians in the Catacombs could hardly have been more reverent."⁴ Chamberlain, in contrast, found his spiritual home and personal mission in the "inner circle" of Wagnerites; in the "Temple of Music" his personal fears and loneliness were excised, his hopes were kindled, his views shaped, and he willingly let himself be carried into a mythical *völkisch* world, which was often more real for him than the one in which he lived. It is difficult to recapture the tone and mood of the Bayreuth *Kreis* that gathered around Wagner's widow determined to transform the small Franconian town into the focus of a cultural crusade. The writings and varied activities of Chamberlain mirror the growth of "the Bayreuth Idea," revealing the spirit and ideals that inspired the cult, the way it adjusted to developments in German society and politics, and its impact upon German national consciousness. In recent years historians have begun to show greater interest in the Wahnfried circle around Cosima, but no account has placed Wagnerism in the cultural and political matrix of Wilhelminian *Weltpolitik*, the defeat of 1918, and the politics of the radical right during Weimar. In shaping the destiny of Bayreuth, Chamberlain's central role is undeniable.

It was Chamberlain who constructed an ideological bridge between Wagnerism and the broader tradition of nationalist and racist thought; his work stands at the confluence of Bayreuth and the Germanic ideology. In breaking out of the narrow confines of the cult he became nationally—even internationally—famous as a popular philosopher and cultural critic. Beginning with *The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*, a panoramic racial history described by one English reviewer as an "Iliad of conflict between German and Semite," he elaborated an integral *Weltanschauung* that was thoroughly Wagnerian and also supplied a cultural justification for doctrines of Pan German imperialism. With Chamberlain popular racism reached a new stage: more than any other writer he

synthesized the various strands of German racism around 1900, endowing his books with a scientific and scholarly aura, disassociating himself from vulgar prejudice, and offering an apparently balanced and informed judgment. His public success provides an example of the ways in which racism and anti-Semitism, under the guise of a search for truth, penetrated social circles that found more popular ethnocentrism too crude and radical. It also reminds us that race thinking is a central theme not an aberration or minor byroad in the intellectual history of Europe from the French Revolution to the Nazi Reich.

Above all Chamberlain's writings attest the pervasiveness of anti-Semitism in Germany both before and after World War I. Until recently it was widely believed that animosity toward Jews abated with the economically prosperous years after 1896 and the simultaneous slow decline of the anti-Semitic parties in the Reichstag. But a growing body of evidence now casts doubt upon this assumption and indicates that prejudice against Jews remained deeply ingrained in social and political life and assumed a variety of new forms outside parliamentary politics. Indeed, it was during the 1890s that Jews began to organize nationally in defense of their civic rights, protesting the arbitrary actions of the bureaucracy and the continued discrimination they suffered in the army and civil service, as well as taking issue publicly both with legislation that threatened Jewish interests and the steady stream of anti-Semitic literature. Admittedly, German Jews had made startling gains since the beginning of the nineteenth century, but the problem of successfully assimilating while preserving a Jewish identity remained at issue. *Causes célèbres* like the Xanten ritual murder trial in 1892, social slights and rebuffs, and the prevalence of "respectable" or scholarly anti-Semitism among the elites of German society continued to give cause for alarm. Chamberlain's large readership was merely one of many signs that hatred of Jews was far from being an unfortunate remnant of a past age, an outmoded superstition that time and experience would eradicate.

Recently historians have unearthed a mass of new evidence about the Wilhelminian Reich and have pointed to the

years 1890–1914 as a crucial period in the evolution of German politics and of the nation's sense of its role in Europe and the world. Tariff debates, imperial rivalries, the construction of a battle fleet, the rapid growth of Social Democracy and increased political pressures from newly mobilized strata of the petty bourgeoisie all placed a heavy strain on the political system and fostered the development of new techniques and styles of politics, and new pressure groups which played a potent role in opinion-making. These years saw rapid changes in the German right, hastened by pressure from such groups as the Pan-Germans and the Naval League; sharp differences of interest and goals continued to divide the right and helped to fragment organizations, but this did not prevent a marked degree of ideological consensus of a negative sort from developing. Anti-Socialism, anti-liberalism, and mounting dissatisfaction with the existing parliamentary structure were coupled with sweeping assertions about the mission of German culture and a broad *völkisch* ideology that contained a varying but ever-present quotient of anti-Semitism. Although he was not a political activist in the usual sense, Chamberlain's thought must be placed in this larger context: his cultural vision embraces the complicated structure of nationalist feeling at the turn of the century and discloses something of the gradual process whereby large numbers of educated Germans became accustomed to racialist rhetoric and forms of argument and desensitized to the plight of Jewish fellow citizens.

The third and final section of the book deals with Chamberlain's life after he had gained the acclaim of Kaiser Wilhelm and had won widespread attention as a prophet of Germanism. It opens with a portrait of Chamberlain the private man, beset with domestic troubles, but then focusses primarily upon his public image even as Chamberlain came to regard himself largely in terms of his public significance. After moving to Bayreuth in 1908 he grew steadily more apprehensive about the direction of German politics and the materialist values which seemed everywhere triumphant. Though his private life was now happy and peaceful, he experienced deep disquiet at the deterioration of Anglo-German relations, appalled by the approaching prospect of having to choose

between his birthplace and his adopted land. With the outbreak of war in 1914, Germany's total defeat four years later, and the establishment of a republic, Chamberlain saw all his hopes for a German-dominated Europe destroyed. His final years (hard in some ways to describe because he was more an observer than an active participant in the right's campaign against the hated "*Judenrepublik*") dramatize the bewilderment and despair felt by so many conservative minded Germans at the collapse of the *Kaiserreich*. His ultimate destination in the ranks of the National Socialists is well known, but here, for the first time, the details of his political journey are retraced, suggesting something of the common ideological and psychological terrain of the pre-war right and post-war fascism. In these years the politicization of art at Bayreuth rose to new heights, foreshadowing the complete identification of the *Festspiele* with the Nazi state. How far this alliance of Wagnerism and fascism can be ascribed to ideological agreement has, of course, been a subject of heated debate ever since.

Biography is today an astonishingly popular genre; studies of Hitler and other figures of Germany's recent past abound on the shelves of bookstores and public libraries. But this vogue among general readers has been paralleled by declining interest among academic historians and researchers. Apart from attempts at collective biography or prosopography, biography is not—as Fritz Stern has recently reminded us—usually considered the most apt medium for treating the kinds of problems concerning historical structures that currently dominate scholarly investigations.⁵ Even successful practitioners of the craft like Martin Duberman have raised serious doubts about the possibility of ever recapturing a past personality, of comprehending and unraveling the tangle of human motives and emotions.⁶ These are worries that plague anyone who tries to reconstruct a life. As Stefan Zweig wrote: "Intuition knows more of a man than all the documents in the world." A biographical portrait is pieced together out of large numbers of separate fragments. Nothing should be invented, but it is of necessity a process of imaginative reconstitution, of

overcoming lacunae of evidence that inevitably exist—and this makes us uneasy. But, for all its hazards, a strong case can be made for biography on the grounds that it helps us grasp the very complexity of the past, the web of associations that link an individual to his times, and the manifold sources from which social, political, and cultural attitudes are formed. And while it carries the obvious peril of narrowing the historian's focus and inflating the historical role of the individual, it can also provide an antidote to the temptation to reduce people to ideological types and to distort the nuances, mental outlook, and moods of the past under the weight of concepts and structural abstractions. This seems to me especially true when attempting to grasp the character, depth, and resilience of racial prejudice which has too often been treated as a political device of negative social integration or analyzed purely as an epiphenomenon of class relationships.

Psychobiography, in contrast to more conventional forms, has attracted greater scholarly interest of late, especially among those writing about National Socialism; this is not surprising since the enormities of Nazi terror seem to defy all rational explanation and to exhaust the conventional categories of historical analysis. In a review of recent research, Peter Loewenberg has assessed the now-extensive psychohistorical literature on German political figures, the German family and social structure, national identity and racism.⁷ The list is long and impressive, ranging from Erik Erikson's pioneering studies in the 1950s to the recent psychobiographies of Hitler by G. L. Waite and Rudolph Binion. In considering the life and milieu of Chamberlain I have learned a great deal from this literature, particularly from several of the earlier contributions—by N. W. Ackermann, M. Jahoda, M. Wanhg, and H. V. Dicks—on the role of projection, displacement, and identification in the psychodynamics of racism.⁸

But mine is not at all a psychobiography; not only do I lack the professional competence to undertake such an analysis, but also the task itself is, as Robert Coles has suggested, fraught with theoretical problems and difficulties over evidence.⁹ Even in a case such as Chamberlain's, where at first the documentation appears surprisingly voluminous and

varied, there are serious gaps. Psychoanalysis stresses the significance of origins and repetitious patterns of behavior, placing an emphasis on infancy and childhood, but most of Chamberlain's letters as a schoolboy and reports about him as a child have not survived. Other lacunae include information about his always fragile health: the extent to which his ailments were psychosomatic can only be guessed at, and there is virtually no hope of finding out more than we know now. Further, his relationship with his first wife, Anna Horst, as well as a range of other significant aspects of his private life and emotional states, are largely veiled from the historian as he tries to probe the many-layered personality behind surviving records. Frequently, biographers concerned to incorporate psychological theory into their work have become preoccupied with diagnosis, with accounting (often in highly speculative fashion working backwards from later evidence) for the genesis of specific patterns of thought and feeling. As for the theoretical difficulties, they largely concern the relationship between psychodynamics and social development; much of what has been written centers upon intrapsychic conflict, interpreting individual behavior in terms of neurotic and regressive drives and defenses, and runs the risk of treating subjects almost in isolation from their historical milieu, as self-contained little monads. The most glaring examples of this are undoubtedly in the past but even those like Fred Weinstein and G. M. Platt who are sympathetic to the enterprise see theoretical pitfalls ahead and refer to "the coming crisis in psychohistory."¹⁰

My goal has been, then, to analyze Chamberlain's dominant character traits, the formative personal and social influences upon his intellectual development, and through his writings and letters to convey something of the atmosphere of both Wilhelminian and Weimar Germany: to describe his style of mind rather than trace his psychic history. For this the sources are rich indeed. He was an extraordinarily prolific letter writer and kept a variety of diaries and journals, recording even his dreams on many occasions. A careful, methodical man when it came to organizing his papers, and one with a well developed sense of his own importance, Chamberlain

threw away little despite a peripatetic life. His second wife, Eva, the youngest daughter of Richard Wagner, was also anxious to preserve everything (or almost everything) and regarded even scraps of paper, insignificant notes hastily made in his "elephantine" scrawl, as sacrosanct. Chamberlain is also more accessible to the historian than most other race thinkers because of the sheer range and number of his published writings. He wrote plays, a scientific treatise, large studies of Wagner, Kant, and Goethe, popular works on religion, and literally hundreds of essays on race, literature, philosophy, politics, and, of course, Bayreuth. Because of the number and scope of his writings—augmented by the ample unpublished materials—it has been possible to give a very full description of his mental world: to show how he brought his opinions about history, religion, philosophy, science, art, and politics into a more or less coherent unity, principally by placing everything in racial categories. Few attempts have been made to analyze the aspirations and fears, the intellectual justifications and political allegiances, in short the private and public existence, of leading race theorists and popularizers, possibly because the subject occupies a position somewhere between intellectual and political history. Gobineau is the one exception who has prompted a number of detailed studies, the most recent in English being a fine account by Michael Biddiss.¹¹ Arguably the most influential race publicist in Central Europe around the turn of the century, Chamberlain, perhaps more than any other comparable figure, lends himself to this kind of cultural biography.

Reading Chamberlain's letters and books I found that a composite picture of the man and his times soon emerged. More troublesome was the task of gauging his influence upon contemporaries. The success or failure of a publicist is registered by his impact on readers, and the most successful—Chamberlain included—are not original thinkers: they draw heavily on the views of others or put into a sharper and more polemical focus ideas that already possess a wider resonance in society. In consequence, it is frequently impossible to separate one writer's impact from that of contemporaries

expressing similar views. And while I have tried to avoid making larger claims than the evidence warrants, it is important to show Chamberlain's ideology as more than symptomatic of broader attitudinal shifts in society, even if his influence must, in the end, be unquantifiable. His work both offers insight into a larger racist and nationalist pathology and was instrumental in promoting it. To illustrate this I have analyzed as wide a selection as possible of contemporary comments, together with newspaper articles and reviews of his most successful book, *The Foundations*. Such sources are admittedly fragmentary and sometimes tenuous: interpreting newspaper reviews, for example, involves assumptions about the relationship between reviewers and the readership of a journal. But, used in sufficient numbers, a generally accurate, if impressionistic, picture emerges of the reception accorded to his book and supplies a basis for generalizations about the mental climate of the time.

The central theme of this study is anti-Semitism and its role in the political culture of modern Germany. Few subjects have attracted as much attention from historians over the last three decades and my indebtedness to earlier scholars—among them Fritz Stern, George Mosse, Uriel Tal, Eva Reichmann, and Ismar Schorsch will be readily apparent. The relationship of Germans and Jews, as many writers have recognized, contains in microcosm the major strands of German history from the late eighteenth century until the Third Reich. It is a subject, in Stern's words, that "touches the raw nerves of German society," one that casts a searchlight on the complex responses of Germans to the forces of social, political, and cultural change.¹² "In no other European society," Ismar Schorsch asserts, "were Jewish-Christian relations shaped by such a comprehensive structure of ideological anti-Semitism."¹³ Thus, although an Englishman by birth, Chamberlain's life intersects some of the principal themes of German history: among them the impact of industrial capitalism upon a tradition-bound state, the character of German

liberalism and nationalism, German perceptions of the state and the place of politics in national life, and the process of secularization.

There are, of course, many aspects of German-Jewish history, and of the development of German anti-Semitism, which fall outside the chronological scope of this book. Chamberlain knew little of Germany before the 1880s and died before Hitler became Chancellor. The long and widely debated process of Jewish emancipation, ending with the granting of full legal equality under the new German federal constitution of 1871, has recently been the focus of intensive research. As Reinhard Rürup and others have shown, the politicization of anti-Semitism was already well advanced by 1850 and, two decades later, "formed part of the foundation stock, as it were, of the new *Reich*."¹⁴ Chamberlain, then, was one of the inheritors of these earlier forms of prejudice; he in part continued and in part renewed the anti-Semitic tradition, joining recently developed doctrines of eugenics, craniometry, and anthroposociology to the older themes of romantic *völkisch* thought, and strengthening still older Christian superstition with secular arguments. His ideas should not be equated with the racial elitism of Himmler or Heydrich, though the former read and admired his work. Chamberlain was a man of earlier and more settled times. Jean Réal reported a conversation with Eva Wagner-Chamberlain in December 1938, a month after the *Reichskristallnacht* set off a country-wide pogrom. Eva, who was an ardent Nazi, nevertheless commented: "My husband would not have liked this!"¹⁵ She was probably right: it is essential to keep in mind the distinction between vicious rhetoric and brutal action, between those who theorized about and those who commanded the lives of others. Chamberlain never explicitly advocated violence toward Jews, let alone their extermination; but the germs of violence were undeniably present in his rhetoric before 1914, and in the reception of his writings we find ominous signs of that attitude which later made so many Germans, who were not necessarily anti-Semitic, insensitive to the sufferings of Jews. It has become almost the fashion for historians of Germany to warn against the temptation to look forward to 1933, claiming that the "search

for parallels and prototypes" distorts the history of the *Kaiserreich* and possibly Weimar as well. And yet most of the literature on German anti-Semitism, either explicitly or tacitly, involves an attempt to situate the Nazi era more coherently in the wider framework of German and European history. I have tried to resist falling into the teleological trap but inevitably the career of Chamberlain does lead us on toward the horrifying reality of the Nuremberg Laws and Auschwitz. And if this book offers some enlightenment as to the cultural and political origins of that tragedy it will have served its purpose.

Part I



The Making of a Wagnerite

I must confess I doubt whether humanity ever produced a greater, perhaps as great a genius as Richard Wagner

—Chamberlain (1883)

This opera Tristan and Isolde last night broke the hearts of all witnesses who were of the faith and I know of some, and have heard of many, who could not sleep after it, but cried the night away. I feel strongly out of place here. Sometimes I feel like the one sane person in the community of the mad, sometimes I feel like the one blind man where all others see; the one groping savage in the college of the learned; and always during service I feel like a heretic in heaven.

—Mark Twain at Bayreuth (1891)

Chapter One

An Englishman Uprooted

A LITTLE MORE than 50 miles northeast of Nuremberg lies the town of Bayreuth, roughly in the geographical center of the *Kaiserreich* and yet still within the confines of Bavaria. In the eighteenth century it had enjoyed a brief period of distinction as the residence of the Margraves of Brandenburg and Bayreuth and as the home of the poet Jean Paul. By the close of the nineteenth century it was famous as the center of a growing cult associated with the life and works of the composer Richard Wagner. Wagner had visited the town in 1871 and, after negotiations with local dignitaries, gained permission to build there his ideal National Theater. It took considerably longer and cost more than he expected, but in 1876 the first music festival was staged, inaugurating a tradition which continued after his death and still survives, though greatly modified, in the present day.

A commercial center for the surrounding agricultural region, with little industry apart from a few textile factories, Bayreuth was and still is a quiet town, bypassed by the transforming forces of industrialism. At its heart lies the ornamental eighteenth century *Hofgarten* and the palace of the Margraves, the seat of their administration; close by, bordering on another section of the park, is Villa Wahnfried, the somber stone mansion Wagner had built for himself, which became synonymous with the orthodox Wagnerism publicized by his widow, Cosima, and her circle of devoted helpers. Just a few yards away, across the street, stands another house, of

more recent construction, with nothing distinctive about it except perhaps for the small observatory on the roof. It was here on January 9, 1927, that Houston Stewart Chamberlain died after a long illness. Letters and telegrams poured in from all quarters to his widow, Eva: from politicians, academics, students, writers and royalty. Albert Schweitzer, long an admirer, wrote: "What he has done for the advancement of knowledge will exist as a noble contribution for the good of the *Volk*"; "I will never forget," he added, "that I was permitted to see him in his suffering, a spirit who triumphed over suffering."¹ At his graveside none of his English relatives were present, only fellow Wagnerites and Germans: among them a Hohenzollern prince representing the exiled Kaiser Wilhelm and Adolf Hitler, now beginning to emerge as a political figure. In Wahnfried, Cosima, perhaps the greatest single influence on his life, sat uninformed of the death but clearly aware of it; ninety years old and very fragile, she waited patiently for her own end and never asked after Chamberlain again.

That Chamberlain should die in Bayreuth was fitting, for the town was a symbol of everything that he revered; more than a shrine to Wagner and his philosophy, it was the focus of a campaign to change Germany, to re-create a German nation free of the evils of liberal capitalist society. Chamberlain's life and work were haunted by this vision of an alternate Reich: conservative, idealistic, antimaterialistic and antimodern in its hankering after the simplicity and community of a mythic past. His belief in the ennoblement of man through art, his deep sense of estrangement from the standards and ideals of bourgeois society, his anti-Semitism and contempt for western rationalism all place him within the romantic, *völkisch* tradition of German thought; Chamberlain's achievement was to become one of the leading prophets and moralists of Germanism. Yet unlike the others he was a foreigner, a German by choice and assimilation, not birth. To grasp how this happened we must first turn to the very different surroundings of his early life.

Although as he grew older Chamberlain's acquaintance with his family was to be very limited, confined mostly to letters and short visits, it would be a mistake to conclude that his

background was of little significance in shaping his later career. Throughout his life he retained vivid memories of childhood and showed a strong interest in his own ancestry. Characteristically he began his autobiographical reflections with an account of his forebears, not out of conventional piety, but because no matter how far he drifted from the attitudes and priorities of his English relatives, he never ceased to be proud of his heritage or to measure himself against it in one way or another.²

There were indeed remarkable personalities on both sides. The Chamberlain family was said to have originated with the earls of Westmorland and through them was connected to Plantagenet blood. The more immediate founder, however, was Henry Orlando Chamberlain, born in September 1773 in London, the illegitimate son of the Earl of Westmorland. An adventurous and spirited youth, he ran away from home as a boy, went to sea, and spent several years wandering about Europe; part of the time he was employed by the Portuguese government. Later he entered the British consular service and lived in Rio de Janeiro as Consul-General for South America, enjoying considerable power at the Brazilian court in a particularly turbulent period. For his services he was rewarded with a baronetcy in 1828, but died in the following year at the age of 56. He had been married twice and the title descended to the sons of the first wife. From the second marriage came five sons, of whom Houston's father, William Charles Chamberlain, was the oldest. All five brothers entered the military and each had a distinguished career. Houston's father joined the navy, going to sea as a cadet at the age of 12 and after a lifetime in the service attained the rank of Admiral. The other brothers went into the Indian Army: one became a General, another a Lieutenant-General, and a third a Colonel. Most decorated of all was Houston's favorite uncle and boyhood hero, Sir Neville Chamberlain, who won fame for his bravery in the Afghan and Sikh Wars and in the Mutiny. He was eventually promoted to Field Marshal by Queen Victoria and made a Knight Commander of the Bath.³

On the maternal side, Chamberlain's genealogy was Scottish. His mother came from a landed family near Edinburgh,

although her father, Captain Basil Hall, had served in the navy and achieved some fame for several long voyages of exploration. The Hall family had more of a scholarly heritage than the Chamberlains, although Henry Orlando had been a keen astronomer and botanist. Captain Basil Hall's writings about his passage to the Lutschu Islands, south of Japan, and his travels on the European Continent were still popular in the 1860s, and Chamberlain's great grandfather, Sir James Hall had earned distinction as a geologist, explorer and onetime President of the Royal Society at Edinburgh. Educated for a time in a French military academy at Brienne, Sir James also became acquainted with the young Napoleon Bonaparte; in deed, Hall—the French Emperor later recalled—was the first Briton he ever encountered.⁴

Such was the family: wealthy, aristocratic, a mixture of scholars, explorers, and soldiers of the Empire. Uncles and cousins possessed landed estates in England and Scotland; some relatives had married into the highest social circles, others established reputations in business, banking, and public administration. They were widely travelled, living for periods in Brazil, the West Indies, Portugal, France, Malta, and India as well as on the European Continent. And yet, in spite of these experiences, they remained—at least to Chamberlain's mind—very British in their prejudices, manners and loyalties, exuding all the patriotic and chauvinistic fervor associated with the upper classes in the Palmerstonian era.

Chamberlain was born at Southsea on the southern coast of England on September 9, 1855. At that time Britain and France were at war with Russia and his father, Admiral Chamberlain, was commanding a ship off the Crimea; his mother who had recently been in Malta visiting her sister, had returned to England for her confinement. Houston was the last of her four children: the oldest, a girl, had died in infancy and there were two small brothers, Basil and Henry ("Harry") aged five and three years respectively.⁵ His birthday was a date of double rejoicing, for on that day the fortress at Sevastopol fell into British hands, marking a turning point in the war. England was entering a quarter century of unprecedented material prosperity; Britain was the world's workshop, the world's carrier,

ship-builder, and banker. Progress and wealth seemed, as though by some new law of nature, to have been showered on this one nation, and success bred a mood of comfortable complacency among the ruling classes and Chamberlain's family among them; their mood was buoyant, optimistic, frequently arrogant and nationalist. Theirs, in the words of W. L. Burn, was an "age of equipoise," less anxious, less divided and less introspective than the generations that followed.⁶ There was, admittedly, no shortage of criticism about its moneyed, materialist ethos, no dearth of anger at the crassness and vulgarity of its Podsnaps and Veneerings, but the mid-Victorian era was predominantly confident and secure, assuaging its doubts by a certain conservative caution and self-protective belief in established institutions.

Consonant with this sense of stability were the long-range plans the Chamberlains made for the sons of the family. It was never doubted that all three would enjoy the same privileges and live up to their duties as subjects of the realm and responsible members of the upper class as their family had done before them. Their paths in life were confidently mapped out by the older generation; their education was to be tailored to their ultimate destination in the armed services or colonial administration. In the event, Harry alone served in the navy as a second lieutenant before being invalided home and discharged; he then went into business. Basil and Houston, who had more in common with each other than either had with Harry, never followed in their father's footsteps; but their scholarly bent reflected nonetheless the influence of family tradition—in this case the Hall family. After the Sorbonne and Oxford, Basil (whose passion for Japanese culture and the Far East was clearly ignited by the example of his grandfather and namesake) made his home in Japan where he became Professor of Literature at Tokyo University. Similarly, Houston's early enthusiasm for science—botany in particular—derived in no small measure from an awareness of the career of Sir James Hall; even his youthful attraction to Germany seemed to him in later years curiously anticipated by his mother, who had been educated by a German governess before that became a fashionable convention and who, when

Houston was six months old, had written: "I have decided to speak only German with this little one from the beginning; it would be such a shame if the child missed the sole opportunity of becoming really familiar with this difficult tongue."⁷

Within a year of Chamberlain's birth his life took a dramatically different course from that envisioned by his parents and relatives. Already sick and weakened by her pregnancy, his mother died before the end of 1856. The problem immediately arose of what to do with the children: their father was constantly away at sea and they were far too young for boarding schools. Of their two grandmothers, Mrs. Basil Hall, who resided in England, travelled too frequently and was too involved in society to be able to provide them with a suitable home. So the task fell to their paternal grandmother, Lady Anne Chamberlain, a formidable woman who as wife to Sir Henry Orlando had spent years in Portugal, Spain, and South America and since his death had lived on the Continent, most recently in Versailles.⁸ Her unmarried daughter, Harriet Mary Chamberlain, was her constant companion and now took over the responsibility of the three young children.

Chamberlain lived on the Avenue de St. Cloud in Versailles for the next ten years. The upbringing of the three brothers was strict, religious, and on the whole happy. Their Aunt Harriet supervised their education in the first few years, assisted by tutors; then, Basil and Harry were enrolled in local schools and attended the nearby Lycée Impériale. Basil alone completed his studies in France while Harry was entered at an early age in a military training school in England. Houston's earliest years were spent largely in the company of his aunt. Such glimpses as we have of him suggest a solitary, sensitive, and imaginative child who did not mix well with others of his own age; later, he recollected that his favorite pastime was to retreat into an empty room, wall himself off in a corner with chairs, and play alone, cut off and isolated from the household around him. His sickly constitution and paleness, which won him the nickname "Poor Little One" or "P.L.O." from his brothers, was a constant source of family anxiety, but when old enough he too attended the lower classes at the Lycée, although he was taken away in the afternoons and sent out for

long, refreshing walks. In these years Houston saw almost nothing of his father, who was either in England or on active service at sea: "You wouldn't know your own father," Lady Chamberlain once told him sadly, "if you met him on the street."⁹ But, though absent, Admiral Chamberlain took his obligations seriously and worried a good deal about the fate of his sons; it troubled him that Houston spoke French with greater facility than his own tongue and that his contact with England was so tenuous. In the autumn of 1866, following the pattern of other English parents whose children lived abroad or in the empire, he enrolled his son in a small private academy in Portsmouth to make the boy sure of his own roots.

The small school he entered, which claimed to train gentlemen for careers in the military and colonial services, was the worst conceivable experience for Chamberlain at this juncture and one that he never forgot. There were many such schools in England (one thinks immediately of Dr. Blimber's establishment in *Dombey and Son*) of varying quality but often with poor living conditions, harsh discipline, and low academic standards; and though the Taunton Commission in 1868 publicized some of the worst abuses in them, they had been and remained for some time completely free of state interference. There can be little doubt about the horror which this shy, sensitive boy experienced at his sudden exposure to English school life. Pampered by his indulgent aunt and grandmother in Versailles, he was now cast into a sports-oriented, rough, and intolerant society where his timidity and "foreignness" and even the Gladstonian liberal politics he had imbibed from Aunt Harriet, made him a frequent target of ridicule and bullying by classmates. He was certainly not the only youth exiled from his family—the school undoubtedly had its share of sons of Anglo-Indian administrators and military families—but he could never conquer his homesickness for France or overcome his terror at the coarseness of the other pupils. Even in later years the memory was still vivid: "I have never again," he wrote, "felt and could not again experience *such* pain. It was the absolute, inconsolable, helpless misery of an abandoned soul, suddenly torn away from love, comfort, gentleness, and friendship and thrown into a Hell of mob rule

[*Faustrechts*].”¹⁰ He pleaded to be taken away; in June 1867 the request was granted, but after a brief vacation in France he was again dispatched to England, this time to the more prestigious Cheltenham College, which specialized in turning out future officers for the army.

Cheltenham, one of the newer boarding schools founded at the beginning of Victoria's reign, combined the ideals and outlook of Arnold's Rugby with a stronger emphasis upon mathematics, modern languages, and science than was true of many of the older foundations. Expanding numbers of such schools, claiming to produce the self-reliant, cultivated Christian gentleman, reflected not only the increasing weight given to matters of class and status in education but also a general trend toward higher educational attainments and qualifying examinations among recruits for the army, civil service, and clergy. For Chamberlain, Cheltenham provided a very different atmosphere from the school he had just left. The teaching staff, many of whom were Anglican clerics, were better qualified; scholarship among the students was more highly valued; and, being much larger, it enabled less gregarious boys to withdraw into their own shells without interference. Here Chamberlain was able to forge a program for survival: he was diligent in his studies, wrote his own plays and stories, and pursued hobbies, especially his life-long interest in astronomy. “The starlight,” he later recalled, “exerted an indescribable influence on me. The stars seemed closer to me, more gentle, more worthy of trust, and more sympathetic—for that is the only word which reflects my feelings—than any of the people around me in school life. For the stars I experienced true *friendship*.”¹¹

Religion was an essential part of daily existence at Cheltenham. Since the 1820s the town had been a center of Evangelicalism and the college was directly under the influence of that party in the Church. Previously Chamberlain's church-going had been mostly confined to Calvinist services which he attended with his aunt at Versailles, but he readily accepted Evangelicalism with its moral fervor, strict discipline, and emphasis upon contrition, work, and prayer as the way to salvation. As a solitary, largely friendless youth who

hated the regimentation of school life, he channelled his anxiety into religious observances; his Christianity was curiously intertwined with a realization that as a son he was subject to a father he barely knew, and as a schoolboy he was subordinate to the college authorities. Years later while living in Dresden, he recalled:

I remember the period of ardent and absolute faith in the religion I had been taught. How unspeakable was the joy of recollecting when I woke in the morning, that Christ was there, near my bed, and that he loved me. How delightful the evening prayers in the college chapel, the prostration before God in the half-darkness, broken only by some few, flickering gas-flames, and whilst the monotonous chant of the responses rose up on alternate sides. Perhaps I was not very orthodox, even then,—for I rarely listened to the service; my child's mind was filled by the actual presence of God, and I used to continue repeating between my lips: "Oh Jesus, I love thee, I love thee, I *love* thee!" And then I would pray to Him to love me; and when I had the conviction that He did, then I was more happy than words can say, and at night my friends the stars glittered more brightly than ever. But gloom always soon came over this image; the remembrance of the daily miseries of school-life, of the ever-fretting dependence of a child on the will of others.¹²

Neither at school nor later did he subscribe to church orthodoxy of any kind. In later life he found simple Calvinist services most sympathetic, but his faith was always undogmatic and ill defined, centered around the personality of Christ rather than church doctrine. As far as is known, no crisis of belief or loss of faith troubled him even temporarily; Christianity remained central to his outlook and, unlike many contemporaries, he experienced no real tension between religion and his growing fascination for science.

Chamberlain disliked Cheltenham but began to accept his fate, especially after the death of his grandmother, Lady Chamberlain, in December 1867. Her house in Versailles was sold and he was forced to spend his school vacations with relatives in England. Among them—now as later—he felt completely out of place, and they soon dubbed the rather priggish and withdrawn youth "the distinguished foreigner." His sickly

and nervous disposition cut him off from most of his contemporaries; he was not good at organized games and was frequently excused for health reasons. Finally, a serious breakdown brought his Cheltenham career to an abrupt close in the fall of 1869. Oblivious to the signs of psychological strain, the doctors who attended him diagnosed a respiratory condition and prescribed an immediate change of air. Houston was once again placed under the care of his Aunt Harriet and sent first to English seaside resorts and then to the Continent. Though the doctors had envisioned only a short rest and recuperation, Chamberlain's English education was in fact over. He never again lived in England and returned there only for brief and infrequent visits. It would have astonished him to discover, as Sir Maurice Bowra relates in his memoirs, that some fifty years later he was reckoned by at least one Cheltenham master as a distinguished old boy of the school.¹³

In his boyhood Chamberlain lacked any firm sense of nationality, and it troubled him greatly. Living in Versailles with his aunt and grandmother, he felt himself neither English nor French. The language he wrote and spoke most of his first thirty years was French, but he was always regarded there by friends and acquaintances as a foreigner. Indeed, his early environment cultivated this feeling of separateness. His family were friends of the André, Pressensé, and Neuflyze families, wealthy Protestant bankers who were extremely conscious of their Calvinist faith and their distinctiveness as a religious minority.¹⁴ At home on the Avenue de St. Cloud, English was always spoken, except when addressing servants. Houston, of course, spoke French with his childhood acquaintances in the park at Versailles. Lady Chamberlain's French friends (mostly army officers and government officials, apart from the Protestant bankers) came to the house, but more memorable to the impressionable child were the visits of relatives, businessmen, and diplomats from England. Their bearing and conversation left no doubts as to national superiority, and French attitudes were a constant source of ridicule. Aunt Harriet was the sole member of the family to immerse herself in French culture and to respect French ways, but even for her British superiority was unquestionable. "Already when quite young," Cham-

berlain wrote, "I had imbibed this superciliousness, and had learned to mock 'French frogs' to despise 'French liars,' and to ridicule 'French vanity.' If the teacher in a history lesson spoke of a French victory or the glorious conclusion of a peace for France, the conquest would be represented at the family table as a let-down or a fluke, and the world imperium of Britain would be counterposed to the French success."

He was taught the blessings of English rule and believed the fate of India and Ireland was enviable; unquestionably, the political traditions of England outshone all others. "What child," he asked, "would have been able to withstand the influence of such ideas. And the result of this influence was that even as a child I felt foreign in the France I loved." And yet, on the few occasions he visited his maternal grandmother, Mrs. Basil Hall, in England, Chamberlain felt even more alien and out of place. On one occasion after being run-over by a tradesman's cart, kicked by an irate ass, and tormented by other children as the "French fop" [*französische Laffe*] Houston could not wait to return to France. "Already in my fifth year," he claimed, "I felt completely foreign and uncomfortable in the island kingdom and shrieked with joy when, after a short sojourn, I felt the soil of the Continent beneath my feet again."¹⁵

This sense of isolation, of having no home or roots, dominated the first twenty years of Chamberlain's existence, or at least so it seemed to him in later life. Departure from Versailles and school in England never had for Harry the same catastrophic consequences as for Houston, while Basil settled down easily to life at the Lycée and the Sorbonne and then Oxford. After his departure from England in 1870, Chamberlain spent the next nine years travelling in Europe; of his birthplace he had only bad memories. This knot of national estrangement and personal anxiety remained entangled in his character, and his sense of homelessness reasserted itself later in an impassioned search for roots in Germany. His hostility to England was also mixed with strong elements of guilt and self-doubt, a sense of failure which at times accentuated his bitterness and at others compelled in him a respect for the strength, values, and traditions of his native land. His travel-

ling companion and surrogate parent during these nine years was Aunt Harriet. Little information about her survives: she was intelligent, well read, selfless, and intensely devoted to her brothers and their families. After travelling with and caring for her mother, she never married but took on the task of raising first Houston and his brothers, then a niece who had been orphaned. After 1878 she mostly lived in England looking upon Houston as a son, providing him with money when he needed it, and corresponding with him every few days until her death in September 1899.

After leaving England in June 1870, Chamberlain and his aunt first visited Bad Ems. Conflict between France and the German states was imminent, and Chamberlain always claimed to have witnessed personally the celebrated encounter between the Prussian monarch and the French ambassador, Benedetti, in the public gardens of the spa which provided the final push toward war. Still in Germany when the conflict began, the youth spent hours at the railway stations at Ems and Heidelberg watching the troops embark for the front. The electric atmosphere, the early news of victories, and the sound of the guns around Strasbourg were exhilarating to Chamberlain and he was overwhelmed with admiration for the military prowess of Prussia.¹⁶ This was his first experience of Germany: years later, in 1915, he described it, with suitable embellishments, for the German wartime public, in part to bemoan the loss of national vitality and to exhort a spiritual rebirth of the German *Volk*:

From the beginning, before his [i.e. Chamberlain's] eyes was not a philistine Germany, not a Germany of travelling salesmen and company directors, still less a nation of unrealistic dreamers and professors, and least of all a Germany of chattering parliamentarians and weak-kneed ministers. Rather, it was a *heroic Germany*, establishing itself with the insuperable power of right and its knightly cadres commanded by immortal heroes.¹⁷

No letters or comments written by Chamberlain or his Aunt Harriet in these months survived; only his wartime reminiscences exist, written after he had lived for three decades

in Central Europe. Considering their years at Versailles and their love of French culture, it would be surprising if Chamberlain or his aunt were as militantly pro-German as he later suggested. Possibly, the boy had no deeper understanding of what the war meant and perhaps he was oblivious to all but the excitement of uniforms, parades, and the reports of battles; but his aunt and other relatives, like Sir Neville Chamberlain, were undoubtedly troubled by the major redrawing of the European frontiers and the shift in the Continental balance of power that the conflict brought about.

As the war entered its final stages with the German armies occupying large areas of northeastern France and laying siege to Paris, Aunt Harriet returned to the difficult problem of Houston's education. No further plans had been made after he left Cheltenham, as it was assumed that he would soon recover sufficiently to resume his studies in England. But several relapses in his health lengthened the period of recuperation and necessitated some alternative solution. A private tutor was obviously most suited to Houston's circumstances and, while staying at Montreux with Sir Neville Chamberlain, Aunt Harriet hired the services of a young German theology student, Otto Kuntze, who had travelled south after two serious hemorrhages. The son of a pastor from the north Prussian town of Stralsund, Kuntze was a learned and remarkable teacher who put order and discipline into Chamberlain's studies for the first time, and—as an ardent nationalist—helped fire his pupil's enthusiasm for the cultural and scientific heritage of Germany. And while Kuntze was Chamberlain's tutor for only a brief period, his significance in the youth's imaginative *Wendung zum Deutschtum* can scarcely be exaggerated; they remained lifelong friends and correspondents (though most of Kuntze's letters have been lost) and the tutor read critically and advised Chamberlain on all his later books.¹⁸

Initially Kuntze was hired to give instruction in the German language, but this experiment proved such a success that by May 1871 he took on the task of full-time tutor. Chamberlain's health continued to give rise to alarm: in May 1871 he contracted scarlet fever and some weeks later, while convalescing at Lucerne, was found to have pleurisy, which brought

both Houston's father and Sir Neville to his bedside for fear of his death.¹⁹ It was not until 1872 that his condition began gradually to improve, and during the next years he lived an itinerant existence, spending the winters in Italy or the south of France and returning north to the higher altitudes of Switzerland for the summer months. Despite a slow start, the boy began to derive great benefit from the teaching of Kuntze. In addition to mathematics, religion and the German language, Chamberlain read widely, chiefly poetry, plays, French classics, and history. He read Montaigne, Pascal, Rousseau, Voltaire, Balzac, and Flaubert; he studied Schiller and avidly consumed historical classics like Prescott's *Conquest of Mexico* and Motley's *Rise of the Dutch Republic*. But, most of all, Kuntze kindled Chamberlain's enthusiasm for botany—a healthier pursuit than his previous passion for astronomy and one which allowed him to spend hours tramping in the open air across the Swiss countryside. At the hands of his tutor, this became more than a pleasant hobby: Chamberlain's notebooks from the period reveal a systematic reading of botanical scholarship and show that he soon possessed a fairly extensive knowledge of the flora of the Swiss mountains.

In May 1873, however, his association with Kuntze came to a sudden end when Admiral Chamberlain recalled Aunt Harriet and Houston to England. Having abandoned all plans for a military career for his son, the father remained anxious about his future and intent on settling him in a suitable vocation. His latest solution was for Houston to attend an agricultural college as preparation for farming in Canada or another part of the empire. Houston, who had no taste for these plans at all, remained in Britain for almost seven months, spending much of the time on the Scottish estates of his uncle, Arbuthnot Guthrie, a wealthy financier and landowner; but it soon became evident that his health could not withstand the rigors of the British climate, let alone the more exacting regime of Canada.

Chamberlain returned to the Continent, but by now Kuntze—who in the interim had completed his theology degree—was pastor to the German evangelical community at San Remo. During the summer of 1874, however—a period

which Chamberlain always regarded as the high-point of his education—they continued their earlier studies. “Now that I was free of other preoccupations,” he wrote, “I was incomparably more industrious—besides, with greater travel, I had learnt to value better what significance your teaching had for my whole life. In these months I worked enormously hard, and you responded to my zeal with a devotion which still today arouses the deepest gratitude in my heart. Latin, German, philosophy, and mathematics were the main diet. Also, we read together many other things such as Huxley’s ‘Lay Sermons.’”²⁰ At the end of the summer Kuntze returned to his congregation and soon after left for Germany where he became a *Gymnasium* teacher. Chamberlain continued as before, travelling with his aunt, and for the next three years received no formal instruction. The main question troubling him was whether he could pursue his scientific interests at a university without endangering his fragile health; and if he could, whether his father would accept that choice of a career and allow him to stay outside England.



By 1875 Chamberlain’s ties to England had worn very thin; he was convinced that his health could not withstand the northern climate and, in any case, felt more at home on the Continent. From Kuntze he had learned of the excellence of German scientific scholarship and, as his health recovered in the following years, he grew more confident that he could take the strain of a university career. Periodically, Admiral Chamberlain offered more advice about a possible vocation, at one point suggesting that his son should enter the ministry and become a naval chaplain, but he was less insistent than before and accepted Houston’s negative responses quietly. Aware of Houston’s dedication to botany, he even raised the possibility of a scientific career. Elated, his son confessed: “This has long

been my silent desire, never mentioned to you nor to anyone else because I thought it was against your wishes.”²¹ Inquiries were made about several German universities but some of the doctors consulted about a choice insisted that the northern winters would ruin his health. Hence it was decided to wait for a while and to continue the therapy of the Swiss mountain air. But from 1875, at least, Chamberlain had a goal: to take a degree in science leading perhaps to a career of research or teaching.

His growing fascination with everything German was reflected in his correspondence. In June 1875, for example, still apprehensive about the recent efforts of his father to enroll him in an agricultural college, Houston confessed to Aunt Harriet: “My three greatest wishes in life are: first, to be allowed to remain in Europe and not to emigrate to the colonies, second, to stay far away from England, and third, to settle in Germany.” Descriptions of England were enough to make him despondent: “Your letter containing the description of all your London social life, and the breakfasts and dinners with the high nobility, has put me in a depressed state because of the realization that I could at any time be compelled to return to that world which I hate so.” He added: “The arrival [in Cannes] of dear old Dr. Meyer and his wife from Rostock first lightened the burden of my sorrow. With these good people I feel what I have experienced among so many Germans: that they understand me and I them—a feeling which I have never had with an Englishman.”²² In the following year he asserted: “The fact may be regrettable but it remains a fact; I have become so completely un-English that the mere thought of England and the English makes me unhappy.” Repelled by the coldness and formality of his birthplace he began to seek refuge in an idealized homeland which he called Germany. “I would give my left arm to have been born a German,” he once told Kuntze.²³ In fact, he knew little of Bismarck’s Reich; his picture of Germany was derived from science, literature, philosophy, and music. This attraction was also clearly entwined with his feelings of rebellion against a father whose authority he continued to fear. Also, before long, additional emotional ties greatly reinforced Chamberlain’s feelings.

During the winters at Cannes Chamberlain mixed mostly

with the substantial German colony there, and in the fall of 1874, at a charity bazaar organized by the German residents, he first met Anna Horst. The daughter of a state prosecutor in Breslau, she was in her thirtieth year and earned a living by private tutoring. Chamberlain left no record of their first encounter, but Anna recalled it vividly: "I was struck," she wrote, "by the shyness of this very slim young man in a huge grey hat, whose beautiful eyes were hidden (unnecessarily it seemed to me) by spectacles." They were alike in many ways: both were nervous, shy, and lonely, and both longed for more intimate companionship; they also shared enthusiasms for poetry and music as well as for botanical expeditions into neighboring countryside.²⁴

With the exception of Aunt Harriet and Kuntze, Chamberlain had never before experienced a close relationship with anyone. Seeing a great deal of each other in Cannes and then in the spring and summer of 1875 at Montreux, where Anna had a job tutoring, Houston soon became completely infatuated—much to his aunt's disquiet. Already in 1875 he was contemplating marriage, although he recognized the obstacles were formidable: he was 20 years old and had not yet embarked on a career; his income was inadequate to support a wife, and his family were certain to object to so youthful a marriage to a Prussian girl ten years his senior with neither social position nor wealth to her credit. Anna was also troubled by the age difference between them, but allowed her reservations to be swept aside by Houston's insistence.

Expectations of a hostile response in England proved correct and for the next three years they saw each other at Cannes in the winters and corresponded during the spring and summer seasons.²⁵ Meantime, Chamberlain tried unsuccessfully to publish the poems and plays he was engaged in writing, and pressed on with his botanical and scientific studies. Recurrent bad health, especially a severe case of jaundice in the summer of 1877, reawakened family suspicions about the incurable delicacy of his constitution and made university study a receding goal. So his frustrations increased. He was forced to postpone marriage till he was older or at least until the strength of his affections had been tested by time; moreover,

his eagerness for a career in science was checked by his family's conviction that taking a degree course might irreparably damage his health.

Amid these disappointments, his attraction to Germany and German culture grew still stronger: it seemed connected in his mind with all his desires for independence, his scientific and marital aspirations. "England," on the other hand, became almost synonymous with his father's well meaning but arbitrary interference, and with all that restrained his hopes. His earliest declaration of spiritual allegiance to Germany dates in fact from this time: after writing several descriptive letters to Anna while on a tour through Spain in 1876, he tried to set on paper his feelings for her birthplace. The result was an astonishing outpouring of German idealism which anticipated in a remarkable way his later admonitions to Germans and eulogies to the Reich:

Seville, Tuesday 23rd May 1876

I cannot tell you how much my reverence, my passionate love for Germany and my faith in her, increases. The more I learn of other nations, the more I mix with people of all classes—educated and uneducated—from all the countries of Europe, the more I love Germany and the Germans. My belief that the whole future of Europe—i.e. the civilization of the world—rests in the hands of Germany, has now grown to a firm conviction. The German's existence is quite different from that of other men—in him self-awareness and the feeling of his own worth have reached their high-point. He is both artist and practical organizer, thinker and activist, a man of peace *par excellence* and the best soldier, a sceptic and the only man who is really capable of belief. But, as always, the greater the natural gifts, the greater the responsibilities which go with them. Germany's role is a tremendously difficult one and if she is to fulfill it, the whole nation must recognize the task and strive together as one for its accomplishment. Not only does Germany have so much to perform and develop, but in the meantime, she must preserve herself against the animosity and misjudgments of all Europe. If one is not caught up in all this, but can observe the course of things from afar, the question often arises: "Will Germany be able to fulfill her allotted task? Will she accomplish it?" And though one may love Germany with all one's heart

without seeing any overhanging clouds still one must reply: No!—if the fundamentally corroded moral relations are not improved (and they will not stay as they are; if they do not improve, then they will deteriorate) No!—if the whole nation does not understand that purity is the greatest strength of a people. And so, while the future of Europe depends on Germany, Germany herself can only have a future if the roots of the present condition are attacked and if morality is raised aloft as the principal weapon against the rest of the world. If Germany does not understand this, then she too must fall—fall prey to the barbarians, without having fulfilled her role. . . . (Ah God! What kind of a German am I to write in this way! Don't be angry with me, for certainly I am no German).

6:45 in the evening. Ah you beloved German nation! Will you never discover your exalted role and see that your ordained path is not to be that of the other nations?²⁶

These passionate lines on the moral duty of Germans are curiously reminiscent of Wagner and Lagarde, and yet at this time Chamberlain knew little of Wagner and nothing of Lagarde. He had read the Grimms and some of the German romantics, and had imbibed the staunch Prussian viewpoints of Kuntze. But neither the immediate circumstances surrounding the letter nor the exact origins of his thoughts is evident. Since the letter is one of the very few to have survived from this period of his life and since similar sentiments do not recur in his writings until more than seven years later, it must remain something of a mystery. Certainly, it is significant that his thoughts were addressed to Anna Horst, and clearly his feelings for her and his love for Germany had become closely intertwined, especially in view of the rather snobbish disparagement his relatives felt for Anna both as a foreigner and as a working woman of decidedly middle class family.²⁷

In 1878, after years of overwork as the naval commander at Devonport, Admiral Chamberlain died. Houston felt little grief; although he recognized his father as a limited but well-meaning man, they were almost complete strangers. The father's death did, however, mean financial and personal independence for the son, and Chamberlain now began to chart his own course. His four-year relationship with Anna was his immediate concern. Despite continuing family dissatisfaction

they were married on April 9, 1878. "Aunty's" mood especially worried Chamberlain but his brother Basil assured him it was only the transient reaction of an over-possessive woman to the loss of her youngest. "I *do* know," wrote Basil a few days before the wedding, "the terribly jealous temper that has caused her and others so much unhappiness through life. I had the same experience of it with regard to the very dear friendship that binds me to Aunt Fan. . . . Perhaps you may not know that there was the same sort of thing in my father's case when he first married. She was, I believe, almost frantic with jealousy but it all past [*sic*] over."²⁸ After the marriage Aunt Harriet accompanied the newlyweds on the first stage of their honeymoon along the shores of Lake Geneva. She then left them to meet her niece, Mary, a sickly girl whose father had recently died in Abyssinia and who now received the attentions which had earlier been lavished upon Houston.²⁹

After a brief vacation in Switzerland, Anna and Houston travelled north to Breslau, where her family lived. No evidence survives about the Horst family. There are some flimsy indications that her father was a Jew who had converted to the Christian faith; if true, this could possibly have had some bearing on the later development of Chamberlain's racial views, but nothing resembling hard evidence is available.³⁰

Another aspect of Chamberlain's life about which he was eager to act was his education. His first plan was to reside in Florence, where the climate would be beneficial to his health, and where he could study botany at the university under the guidance of Professor Parlatore. Having improved their Italian, Houston and Anna travelled south to Italy by way of Munich, arriving in November 1878. The architectural and artistic splendor of the city overwhelmed Chamberlain, and though he at first applied himself diligently to mastering Italian and extending his knowledge of plant physiology, he was soon completely distracted by his surroundings. Recalling the experience later, he wrote:

I had intentionally not prepared myself at all for Florence as an artistic center: my plan was to learn the language and then to dedicate myself to the study of botany; nothing should divert me from it. It turned out completely otherwise. Never shall I

forget the hour when, one evening, I was strolling aimlessly through the town, and came for the first time unexpectedly, across the Piazza della Signoria. The sight of such beauty was so overpowering that a kind of dizziness overcame me and I had to withdraw into a door-way, lean against something and gradually recover. I returned home stunned. This was a different order of ecstasy to that which I experienced in the stars and later in flowers. These works of beauty fashioned by man, took my breath away and destroyed my equilibrium. Nurtured in a completely unartistic environment, I had not the slightest foretaste of such things. They produced a complete revolution within me.³¹

He hastened to purchase art books, eagerly devoured large numbers of histories, and studied carefully the works of Burckhardt. His days began with violoncello lessons and continued with tours of the Uffizi and other galleries. Scientific research was momentarily forgotten: "I was no longer aware that a man named Parlatore even existed, let alone that I had come to Florence on his account." Only in May 1879 did Chamberlain's mood of elation and artistic enchantment give way to one of self-doubt and worry. He began to reprimand himself for his carefree existence, fearing that he was becoming a mere "dabbler," disengaged from society and given over to his own amusements:

Suddenly a kind of vision of my future existence rose before my eyes. I saw myself—like so many of my English countrymen, whom I had observed from a distance—vegetating without any goals in life; in part connoisseurs of art, in part amateur musicians, perhaps occasionally dabbling in botany and geology—a dilettante in the bad sense of the word, namely a dilettante in life, a man without responsibilities, and without any self-imposed obligations. Confronted with this picture I shuddered with horror.³²

Chastened by these thoughts, and convinced that his talents lay in science rather than the fine arts, Chamberlain felt a compelling need to escape the distractions of Italy. He made a sudden decision to move to Geneva, which offered the advantages of a prestigious university as well as reasonable proximity to the Mediterranean. When he arrived the univer-

sity semester was already in progress, but he settled in quickly and easily surmounted the first hurdle of matriculation exams, and was formally admitted to the faculty of Natural Science in the fall of 1879. During the next two years he worked hard, taking a wide range of courses in physics, chemistry, botany, anatomy, anthropology, and zoology. Then, in the fall of 1881, instead of taking his exams for an undergraduate degree in parts spread over two or three years, he did them all at once, learning shortly afterward that he had placed first in the university. After the many trials and setbacks of his youth this achievement was especially gratifying, as it crowned with success the first stage of his chosen career, helped to buttress his self-confidence, and enabled him to justify his way of life to his relatives in England. Eager to make up for lost time, he proceeded at once to the doctorate, which his professor of chemistry, Carl Graebe, had intimated could be completed in a little over a year, leaving him free for postdoctoral research or a regular teaching appointment.³³

His thesis was to have been on some aspect of plant chemistry. "If I am not mistaken," wrote Chamberlain later, "it was concerned with the vegetable fats of a certain botanical group."³⁴ But a renewed bout of sickness soon forced him to discontinue laboratory work for a time, and further reading and reflection focussed his attention on a problem of a very different kind from the biochemistry envisioned by Graebe. The new interest concerned the motion of sap in plants, a tricky subject for research and one which involved the philosophical debate between mechanism and vitalism. In 1882 when he started on the subject, Chamberlain had little real grasp of what it entailed. He was hopeful that the research could be undertaken without complicated apparatus and planned to establish a laboratory at home, which would allow him to work as his health permitted, without necessitating long hours at the university.³⁵

He began diligently but without adequate supervision found himself sinking deeper and deeper into a bog of endless and mystifying detail; each question, each set of results opened massive new avenues for research and the prospect of obtaining the doctorate in 1883 rapidly faded. It was not until

the spring of 1884 that he felt "firmly in the saddle," and even this proved too optimistic. The first task was to select suitable plants for long periods of experimentation and then to design an accurate manometer for measuring sap movements. Previous research had failed, in part, because of insufficient readings, and so Chamberlain molded his daily existence to the requirements of his work. "I imposed a regimen on myself so that, even in the evenings and nights, not more than four hours at most would be allowed to pass between two successive readings of the various plants under observation. If, for example, I had left my laboratory at eleven in the evening, I set the alarm for 3 A.M. and early at 7 A.M. I was again at work. If, on the following night, I permitted myself to retire at 9 P.M., so I got up again at 1 in the morning and again at 5."³⁶

Such was his mode of life as a doctoral candidate. Discussion of the direction of Chamberlain's research, may be postponed until a later chapter, for he was not to finish the thesis until 1896. The more immediate consequence of the exacting work schedule he set himself was that it further undermined his health and contributed to a complete nervous breakdown which he was to suffer in 1884—although, as will become clear, it was far from being the only cause of his collapse.³⁷



Life in Geneva was not all work. There were trips into the mountains and journeys further afield to Germany. In September 1882 Chamberlain and Anna left their small apartment in town and moved into a large rambling villa at Vert Pré with splendid views of Mont Salève to the south. The bucolic existence suited them both and was enlivened by a constant stream of house guests. He spent a great deal of time reading widely—Buckle, Spencer, Kant, Schopenhauer—and took piano lessons from Ruthardt, a friend of Nietzsche and one of the few welcome visitors at the retreat in Sils Maria. Though

many of Chamberlain's friends were later critical of Anna, and Hermann Keyserling for one snobbishly referred to her as a "second-rate governess type," their marriage in these early years seemed to be working well. Chamberlain appeared happy and at ease; he contentedly assured his Aunt Harriet: "My first impression at each letter from London, always is—thank heavens I'm not there!—so please don't think it necessary to tone down your glowing descriptions, in order not to 'mir das Herz schwer machen.'" ³⁸

Though Ruthardt regaled Chamberlain with stories about Nietzsche, it was not the solitary prophet of Zarathustra who increasingly absorbed his intellect, but rather Nietzsche's cultural antagonist, Richard Wagner. He had become a patron of the Bayreuth *Festspiele* as early as 1878, although he did not attend the performances until four years later. Like many young students and aesthetes, Chamberlain was enthralled by the prospect of an "artwork of the future" and clutched eagerly at the chance to participate in publicizing Bayreuth and raising contributions. Wagnerite friends like the French writers Edouard Dujardin and Theodor de Wyzewa, and the highly talented but as yet untried stage designer Adolphe Appia, soon became regular visitors at Vert Pré. And before long, the volatile, dilettantish side of Chamberlain's nature, which he had suppressed after fleeing Florence, began to reassert itself in a desire to devote more and more of his time and energy to the cause of Wagner. Yet he still wanted to complete his thesis and obtain a university appointment of some kind. The result, in 1882 and 1883, was a deepening tension between his interests in science and his fascination for Wagnerism; and it was this indecision and general restlessness which seems to have prompted him to a surprising but—in terms of his future life—very significant course of action.

At the beginning of 1883 Chamberlain suddenly left his laboratory in Vert Pré, went to Paris, and began to concentrate on his financial affairs. We know almost nothing of his reasons: he had shown no interest in business before and carefully omitted all reference to this episode in later life—in his invectives against contemporary Mammonism he conveniently

forgot that he too had once sullied his hands. There is no sign that he and Anna faced any sudden or unaccustomed pecuniary problems; they lived on investments and were able to travel, pay for Houston's education, keep up an expensive villa with at least one full-time servant, and make donations to favorite causes like Bayreuth. Possibly the financial instability of the early 1880s had reduced the returns on Chamberlain's stocks and he was afraid of eating away his capital reserves. He had spent two years on his dissertation and had made little headway; the prospects of finishing quickly and earning money by teaching were remote. But his decision may also have been influenced by the very frustration of his botanical research, and perhaps his behavior may to some extent be interpreted as the attempts of a 28-year-old man who had never worked to prove to himself and to others that he could succeed in the business world. In addition, the Wagnerite circles in which he hoped to move were, generally speaking, wealthy, and possibly he felt he would need more money for travel and other expenses which might result from his activities for the cause. Finally, it may also have been that his growing acquaintance with wealthy Parisian Wagnerites persuaded him that he could, without much difficulty, gain a quick success on the *Bourse*.

Whatever his reasons, Chamberlain began to gamble in the Paris money market and at first could boast some gains.³⁹ By the end of October 1883, he had entered into a small partnership with a Frenchman named Cerceau. They engaged in small-scale brokerage and hoped later to expand into the discounting area. Cerceau was "the *Bourse* man," and looked after the half dozen clerks they employed, while Houston described himself as "the calculator, the plan-maker, the organiser."⁴⁰ In fact, Chamberlain's main task was to make the right contacts in France and Switzerland and to attract new clients, which he hoped to do through his family's friends and business associates, and also through his fellow Wagnerites, for in 1883 he had managed to get himself delegated as the official Paris representative of the Wagner Association.

The timing of Chamberlain's entry into business was singularly inauspicious, for the European money market was

everywhere unstable. In Germany the early 1880s were years of uncertainty, while in France the collapse of the Union Générale in 1882, after a bitter rivalry with the Rothschild Bank, resulted in a panic on the *Bourse* and a flood of bankruptcies. Between 1882 and 1887, France faced mounting budget deficits, industry stagnated, and prices and wages declined. Anti-Semitism became more vocal among those dependent on the financial market, although Chamberlain's correspondence reveals little of this. The kind of business in which he engaged was extremely risky, and by February 1884 his affairs were in a state of crisis. Interestingly enough, however, he traced his difficulties to immediate internal problems within the firm, rather than laying the blame on either the general state of the market or the alleged manipulations of "Jewish finance."

In the absence of other evidence, we must rely entirely upon Chamberlain's view of the firm's failure. Some of his relatives were critical of his own role, but Chamberlain placed all the blame on his partner Cerceau. Houston had spent long periods away from Paris, returning to Anna in Geneva or searching out new clients or attending various Wagnerite functions. When he returned after one of these trips in February 1884, he found the business on the verge of collapse. Without prior discussion, Cerceau had speculated, incurring heavy losses; then, to retrieve the capital he had lost, he ignored the wishes of the firm's customers, failing to execute their orders on time or selling without their instructions in the hope of repurchasing the stock later when the market prices dropped. As Chamberlain admitted to Aunt Harriet: "To make a long story very, very, *very* short: my position is a most critical one." He denied any knowledge of his partner's dealings and set to work to assess the extent of the disaster. The company had not only accumulated losses from its own capital reserves but also owed large debts to its investors. He wrote despairingly: "I see two possibilities: borrow money on which to make a fresh start or pay each man his due and then see how I can earn my livelihood as a crossing-sweeper or something else. As for the first solution to my present difficulties, I can hardly take it into consideration, for I am far too practical to borrow from the

Jews; it is impossible for an honest man to pay their percentage and gain his own livelihood." In any case, he reflected, most of the customers he had cultivated in Germany and Switzerland would desert the firm.⁴¹

Behind these letters to Aunt Harriet was a tacit request for help. He concluded that after everything had been worked out, he and his partner would owe some £1500, "which I cannot possibly hope to raise for some months." He was also insistent that he could succeed and recover his losses if given another chance: "If . . . it would be *possible* for me to begin again, I should do so full of hope and confidence, for the more I see and know the market, the more sure I am of success—and I have a certain number of customers who I know would remain true to me and facilitate a fresh start."⁴² Far from impairing his reputation on the exchange, he argued rather unconvincingly, his recent misfortune had in some ways raised confidence in him.

On April 7, 1884, the partnership with Cerceau was formally dissolved. With Aunt Harriet's assistance, including the transfer of £2000 in securities, Chamberlain made a new start. He worked hard in the following weeks, allowing himself only one relaxation: his activities for the Wagner Association. "I think," he wrote, "it is my passion for Wagner which enables me to stand everything; as soon as the door of my office is closed behind me, I know it's no good fretting, so I eat a good dinner and stroll on the Boulevard, thinking of the *Kunstwerke der Zukunft*, or I go to see one of my Wagnerian friends, or I write to one of my numerous Wagnerian correspondents."⁴³ His relatives in England continued to be disturbed, for they obviously believed Houston completely unsuited for business and doubted that he was persistent enough or sufficiently hard-headed to succeed. Aunt Harriet had from the first been critical of his decision to devote so much time to making money, and other family members harbored doubts as to his innocence in the Cerceau affair. One uncle, Arbuthnot Guthrie, a very successful businessman and a director of the Bank of England, felt the market was far too unstable and refused to assist Chamberlain in gaining new clients.irate, Chamberlain complained to Aunt Harriet: "Uncle Buth

[Arbuthnot] refused point blank to do the only thing I asked him for and which he better than anyone else *could* have done, which was to help me with my business connections." He added defiantly "Last month I earned very nearly £200 in commissions, so you see that my aptitudes are appreciated by some people."⁴⁴

Yet, for all his air of confidence, Chamberlain's second venture also began to go badly, and the constant strain of recent months took its toll. During the summer of 1884 he was plagued with migraine headaches, and in September decided to quit Paris for a while. He told Aunt Harriet: "But now I am *really* going to Vert Pré. I must, I should certainly break down in my best season if I did not try and have a little absolute rest, at least absolute quiet." By the end of September he fell ill, exhausted and overstrained from his recent trials: "In the state in which I am [I am] often very capable and wide awake, but also often at the lowest ebb, so that any trifle can make the balance tip to a serious crisis." He complained of "contraction of the heart and chief blood vessels" and feared increasing deafness. Dictating his correspondence to Anna, he wrote: "You must not be alarmed, dearest Aunty, but it is right you should know that I can now neither *read* nor *write at all!* That is to say, I *can* of course read a few lines but immediately it is as if a hundred daggers were being plunged into my head, and I have to lie down with closed eyes till I recover." Frequent fainting fits, nightmares, and other nervous disorders added to his plight.⁴⁵

With Houston sick, it became Anna's task to tie up his affairs in Paris. Her account of the situation is certainly colored by her loyalty to Houston; the chief problem, she argued, was that of recovering sums owed to her husband by Cerceau and others. A small sum was forthcoming from the sale of furniture and effects from their Paris apartment, but the £2000 in securities loaned to Chamberlain by Aunt Harriet had been disbursed in payments of the partnership's debts. In the eyes of his wife Chamberlain had sacrificed all to ensure that his customers would not lose; his own debtors meantime had defaulted and "there [was] no hope of seeing this money ever!" Aunt Harriet suggested that a lawyer be hired to unravel the

whole affair but Anna rejected the idea firmly on the grounds that Houston would be too distressed.⁴⁶

On the Paris exchange Chamberlain had attempted to prove his ability to succeed in business as he had recently done in the academic world. The resultant loss of financial security was a bitter blow. Not only did he feel a deep sense of humiliation and personal failure, but also the financial dependence which had characterized his life till his father's death in 1878 was now restored. His doctorate was only half completed; he had no private income and no way of earning a living. Failure meant he was again attached to the pecuniary strings of his family in England and it was they who supported him in the following years.

While Anna was in Paris, Chamberlain tried to recuperate at Cannes. She soon joined him and they spent a quiet winter, resting and consulting medical specialists who, after puzzling over the case for some time, finally concluded he was suffering from "the innate, excessive delicacy of the nerves and the great irritability of the *nervous membrane* in general and of that surrounding the nervous system generally." For the moment they prescribed fresh air and leisure, and cautioned Chamberlain that he must abandon in the foreseeable future all scientific research which required long hours of experimentation and broken nights.⁴⁷

Chamberlain's breakdown brought the Genevan period of his life to a close. He no longer wished to remain in Switzerland now that he was unable to finish his doctorate and could not anyway afford the upkeep of a house like that at Vert Pré. Aunt Harriet suggested that Italy might be good for his health, but Chamberlain and Anna preferred Germany, both because living there was relatively inexpensive and more especially because of the availability of good theater and music. Although none of Chamberlain's letters from Geneva had repeated the encomiums of the Seville letter quoted above, he had visited Germany often in the previous five years and found the country increasingly appealing. "I have been to Germany repeatedly these last years," he informed Aunt Harriet, "and I must say that I felt there more completely happy, more at home, more in my *own* element, than anywhere else." In addi-

tion, in Germany he could hope to continue his activity for Bayreuth and Wagnerism. "Thus," he wrote, although I cannot hope ever to be again able to do the smallest thing *materially* for the cause I love above all others, I can be really useful"⁴⁸ After some discussion with friends, he chose to settle in Dresden, a flourishing center of the Wagner movement.



Thus ended Chamberlain's first thirty years. He had entered the world with considerable advantages of wealth and social position, but the course of his early life was heavily determined by his delicate health. Outwardly he looked strong enough, and pictures of him in 1885 reveal a tall, well-built man; but—whether from physical or psychological causes or both—he was weaker than he appeared. One breakdown at fifteen years destroyed his father's hopes that the boy would have an English upbringing followed by a socially acceptable career in the military or some arm of government administration. The second, and more serious, collapse he suffered in 1884 prevented the realization of his hopes to become a scientist. In between, there was a happier period: his association with Kuntze, the early years of his marriage to Anna Horst, and university at Geneva. Not only did the second breakdown nullify his recent academic success, but his financial losses also took away much of the independence and security he had enjoyed since 1878 and made him reliant on the charity of others. He looked forward to substantial inheritances later, but in 1884 as a sick man, with little property and unable to make his own way, his plight resembled the conditions of his youth. The difference was that he was now thirty and had a wife to support.

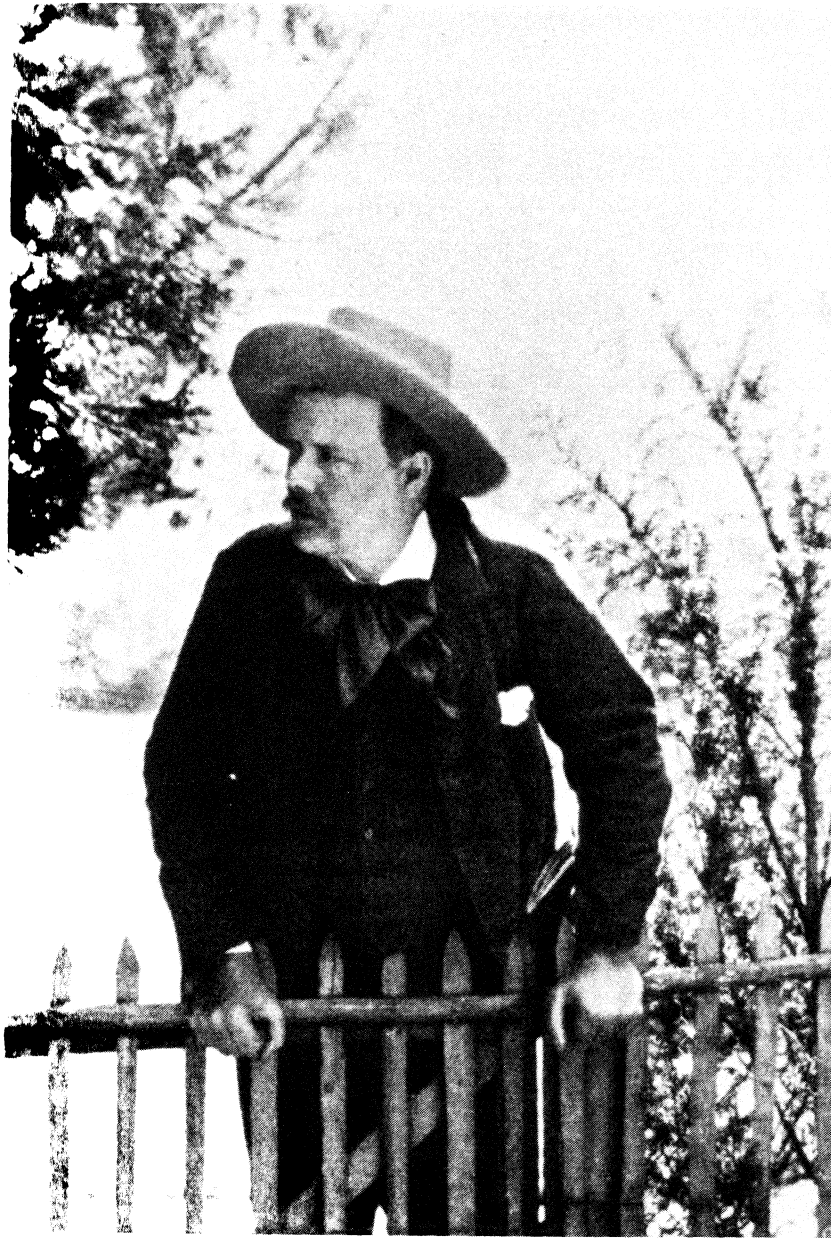
Already in his broad and unconventional education we see developing those qualities of mind—the originality of the autodidact and the encyclopedic knowledge of the dilettante—that



Chamberlain in 1878

later characterized Chamberlain's writings. But in his own recollections he believed that the strongest legacy of his peripatetic youth was a sense of having no nationality, of being in a way the product of three cultures—England, France, and Germany. Had he stayed at Cheltenham, its traditions and rigid training would either have forced his personality into some socially acceptable mold or otherwise created a nonconformist; conformist or rebel the result would assuredly have been a familiar English type. As it happened, Chamberlain grew up feeling equally "foreign" in England, France, and Germany; he lived on the margin of all three cultures. In some cases, sociologists have suggested, this may exacerbate psychological uncertainties and self-division; it may culminate in a vehement *Selbsthass* which gnaws at the self or is projected outward into hatred for others.⁴⁹ But such feelings of "marginality" can also, under certain circumstances, lead to an open-mindedness and receptivity to a wide range of ideas and influences. This was true of Chamberlain's restless, dilettantish spirit in his years at Geneva. He was an English-style liberal in politics, as well as an admirer of German cultural nationalism; a Wagner enthusiast who also liked Berlioz and even Mendelssohn; a student of Kant and Schopenhauer who tried to keep up with the latest works of Flaubert and the Symbolists. Later, in the different atmosphere of the German Reich and with his closer ties to the world of Bayreuth, he began slowly to change; his interests became more exclusive, began to flow in channels dictated by the twin influences of Wagnerism and Bismarckian Germany. As a result, his "marginality" led him, in this new context, to become more assimilationist, more fiercely Germanophile and eager to stress the importance of "rootedness." The passionate Germanism of the Seville letter is absent from the letters he wrote at Geneva; in Dresden that style was rediscovered. Even his appearance changed, indicating a kind of compulsion to find a new self in Dresden; before they left for Germany Chamberlain went off to town and had his long beard removed and his shoulder-length hair cut short.⁵⁰

Finally, Chamberlain had discovered the music of Wagner and in the next years it was by his activity for Wagnerism that



Chamberlain at Vert Pre, 1885

From Anna Chamberlain, *Meine Erinnerungen an H. S. Chamberlain*, Munich: Beck, 1923.

he surmounted his sickness and depression in Dresden and regained a sense of purpose. When he went to Dresden, Chamberlain had only just begun to explore the true meaning of the "Bayreuth Idea." Four years later, when he left, he was emerging as a prominent and valued exponent of the cause.

Chapter Two

The Education of a Wagnerite

IN AUGUST 1870, during a boat trip on Lake Lucerne, Chamberlain heard the name Richard Wagner for the first time. The composer was then living at Tribschen, a spacious villa overlooking the lake where he had been exiled four years before from the court of King Ludwig of Bavaria. Repeated meddling in politics had infuriated the royal ministers, while his adulterous relationship with Cosima Bülow had aroused the disgust and homosexual jealousy of the King. Exile had given Wagner perhaps the happiest years of his life: free from the distractions of Munich, looked after by Cosima, and surrounded by a growing brood of children (including his son Siegfried, who was born in 1869), he was enormously energetic and creative. There were periodic visits from admiring friends like Nietzsche, then a young philology professor at Basel, and ample time to plan for a festival theater. Around the estate was a high wall which cut the house off from the noise and gaze of boat excursions and coaches, packed with inquisitive sight-seers. On one of these boats sat the 15-year-old Chamberlain, intrigued by the heated conversation which animated his fellow travellers at the sound of Wagner's name.¹

In later life Chamberlain asserted that his early upbringing had restrained his strong musical inclinations. His family and early teachers had little interest in music and, as a boy, Houston had little opportunity to hear any orchestras. Though he asked his father to allow extracurricular musical studies at Cheltenham, the request was refused: the general consensus of

the Chamberlains was that, though a necessary accomplishment for young girls who had to ensnare then amuse a husband, musical attainments were quite irrelevant to a young man destined for the military. But, after leaving England, his love for music began to grow. Convalescing near Lago Maggiore in 1872, he listened as a fellow guest at the hotel played selections from Beethoven and was deeply moved. "In these hours," Chamberlain wrote, "a new world opened to me, a world of whose existence I had till then not the remotest suspicion. . . . All pain—and as a sick youth reputedly destined for an early grave, I had experienced much of it—was transformed into ecstasy . . . the world had acquired a new significance." Soon he was himself taking piano and cello lessons during the months he spent at Cannes each year.²

Ironically, Chamberlain first learned of the music dramas and Bayreuth from two Jews whom he met at Interlaken during the summer and autumn of 1875. The first, a Parisian schoolteacher named Lowenthal, was an accomplished pianist; he introduced Chamberlain to the work of Schubert, Weber, and Chopin, as well as Wagner. Unfortunately, Chamberlain recalled, "he knew only a little of Wagner, for one got to hear little of him in the Paris of that time. But some pieces he played wonderfully—such as the overtures to [*Fliegende Holländer* and *Tannhäuser* and the beginning of *Lohengrin*." Attempting in 1917 to reconcile his friendship for this baptized French Jew and his racial outlook, Chamberlain wrote: "Obviously Lowenthal stemmed from the Sephardim; rarely have I encountered the Oriental type so beautifully and nobly educated; but he suffered because of it, for the poor man was inconsolable over his Jewish heritage and all my words could not appease his feelings; certainly, this grief played a part in his early death."³ Lowenthal, it seems, was the first of several Jews in Chamberlain's life who showed him the deep psychological sufferings, the corrosive self-doubt, and self-abnegation which resulted from their being the victims of anti-Semitism. His response was that of pity, rather than rejection of racial ideas and stereotypes.

More important as a source of information about Bayreuth was a second Jew, named Blumenfeld, who came from Vienna,

where the ideas of the Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk* had made an especially great impact upon the musical and literary avant-garde. The Vienna Academic Wagner Society, founded in 1873, was the largest and wealthiest Wagner club; not only did it collect funds for the *Festspiele* and encourage performances of the dramas, but it sought as well to propagate Wagner's social and religious philosophy among the inhabitants of the Austrian capital. Among university students and in groups such as the "Pernerstorfer circle," where young writers and artists confronted the social and spiritual crises of the Hapsburg monarchy, Wagner was a hero and Bayreuth the symbol of cultural regeneration.⁴ Blumenfeld's enthusiasm was typical of his generation, and he urged Chamberlain to attend the first *Festspiele*, which was planned for 1876. But Houston could not afford the tickets and travelling expenses, and his father refused to finance such entertainment and was unmoved by the claim that a new age was dawning in music. Sadly, Houston wrote to Aunt Harriet: "If only I had enough money at my disposal, August 12 would certainly find me in Bayreuth. It will be a tremendous experience and those who attend this performance will have witnessed a turning-point in the history of art."⁵ Such was his enthusiasm before he had attended a single performance of any Wagnerian drama. He followed reports of the festival in the *Kölnische Zeitung* and other newspapers and studied the poem of the *Ring*, which Blumenfeld had urged him to buy. Not surprisingly, when in 1878 he finally saw *Tannhäuser* in a provincial German city, it was a great disappointment: the average provincial theaters were of poor quality when it came to performances of Wagner, and his expectations were enormous. Inadequate productions of Wagner's dramas were to distort their public reception for some years, and it was not until much later that Chamberlain achieved a full appreciation of the earlier works.⁶

Chamberlain's first real exposure to Wagner's art came in November 1878. Shortly after their marriage, he and Anna travelled to see her relatives in Breslau and then, on their way south to Florence, passed through Bavaria where they attended the Munich première of the *Ring*. The experience overwhelmed Chamberlain: "Wagner's work," he told Aunt

Harriet in a particularly effusive letter, "has fulfilled my expectations in every respect and in some has far exceeded them." "What struck me most" he wrote "was the miraculous simplicity and the crystal clear quality [of the work]—which I find lacking in French and Italian operas with their numerous singers and unconnected accompaniment." It was *Rheingold* especially which captivated him: "the marvellous orchestra charmed the ear and invited whoever was capable to gaze deeper and to take pleasure in tracing the ethical and philosophical ideas of the tone-poet; truly an ocean in which man may blissfully immerse himself to gain learning." "As for Wagner's ideal of a new theater," he added, "just one evening was sufficient to convert me and destroy any last reservations of mine."⁷

He at once joined the Bayreuth Patrons Society [*Allgemeine Bayreuther Patronatsverein*] which had been set up in 1872 to raise money for the festivals and to coordinate the activities of local Wagner clubs in Germany and elsewhere. Since his father's death earlier in the year, Chamberlain had become financially independent and was able to give small donations to the cause. He still knew very little of Wagner's work or of the social and political attitudes associated with the elusive "Bayreuth Idea," but his enthusiasm for the cause at once assumed the high seriousness of the most fervent devotees. For him, as for so many contemporaries, the Wagner movement heralded cultural rebirth: he was deeply attracted by its anticapitalist longings and its critique of the spiritual emptiness and fragmented nature of modern society. Bayreuth was a precarious venture undertaken in the expansive era that followed German Unification; it might even be viewed as an artistic analogue of the risky business promotions of those years. It embodied both the ebullient, hopeful mood of the new Reich and also the deeper anxieties and sense of cultural unease that swept across Germany, particularly after the economic crash of 1873.⁸ Wagner saw his creation as a national institution, a center of the struggle for German race and culture, but Chamberlain's initial enthusiasm was diffuse and had little to do with nationalist or political feeling. It was the aesthetic utopianism of Bayreuth that fascinated him, its stress on the in-

ward condition of the individual and on self-realization through art.

As a patron of the *Festspiele*, Chamberlain received the *Bayreuther Blätter*, a journal founded in 1877 to provide a forum for Wagner's ideas and to publish news and correspondence from the growing number of Wagner societies. The first number appeared in January 1878, edited by a Prussian aristocrat, Baron Hans von Wolzogen, who had settled in Bayreuth so as to devote full time to the project. A man of fanatical and idealist temperament Wolzogen, whom Chamberlain once dubbed "the Pope of Wagnerism," edited the *Blätter* until his death in 1938: under his guidance it became the focal point of the Wagner cult, the mediator between Wahnfried and the public, and the official vehicle for espousing Wagner's aesthetic, social, and political views and for interpreting the music dramas themselves. Wolzogen's work and longevity, like that of Wagner's widow, Cosima, gave continuity and stability to the "Bayreuth Idea." No greater contrast could be imagined to Nietzsche, whom Wagner had first eyed for the task. Wolzogen was hardworking, reserved, and deeply religious; and while his confused ideas and mystical utterances sometimes aroused irreverent amusement among other members of the inner circle of Wagnerites, nobody doubted the enormous significance of his dogged and persistent labors for the cause.⁹ Even in 1885 Cosima, who expected self-sacrifice in others as almost a matter of course, could still marvel at his extraordinary dedication. To the conductor Hermann Levi she wrote with unaccustomed frankness: "Wolzogen can certainly not vie with Nietzsche as a stylist at present, but I most decidedly hope that he will train himself to be a writer; I agree with you that he is not a born one. Wolzogen has one of the most curious natures I have ever come across, a life so completely absorbed in an idea would seem incredible had one not seen it."¹⁰

In later years Chamberlain too came to appreciate Wolzogen's personal qualities, but their first dealings with one another, in 1879, were marked by disagreement. Chamberlain was not yet ready for the doctrinaire style of the *Blätter*, and he found himself annoyed by its "outspoken tendency . . . to

oblige the members of the new Patrons Society to support a specific philosophical, religious, or political confession of belief." Often thinking about the efforts of devotees like Heinrich Porges to endow Wagner's work with such a fixed religious and philosophical content, Chamberlain decided to reply with an essay of his own. It was his first attempt to expound his ideas on art, and his strictures of official Wagnerism often sound like criticisms later directed against his own views as a publicist for Bayreuth. His youthful attack, like the opposition he later encountered himself, derived from social and political principles as well as aesthetic ones, for it was with some surprise that he realized that many of his own ideas about politics and social organization were contrary to those sanctified by the *Blätter*. Although his ideas on Wagner and Bayreuth underwent a marked transformation in the next decade, in 1879 he firmly asserted:

It is a completely false and most reprehensible procedure to extract a specific philosophical teaching from art-work. In considering an artist's creations we need not enter into his personal views.

His works breathe a higher spirit, and there is scarcely a more unfortunate and harmful notion to the cause the [Wagner] Verein represents than the idea of "exposing the philosophical views of the Master by means of his works." Outside pure enjoyment of beauty the effect of an art-work is and can only be an aesthetic and—indirectly—an ethical one. . . . Art affects us directly, and its advantage morally is that it, to some extent, elevates man above himself and purifies his spirit without his having to retrace the many stages of ratiocination. For an intelligent man the consequence will naturally be that he is induced to think a lot. But Art—a product of genius which reflects general and absolute Beauty and Truth—can never act as the vehicle for a particular and specific teaching.¹¹

His essay measured the opinions of the *Blätter* against the ideas of Kant, whose *Critique of Judgment* he studied in detail during this time. Chamberlain's argument rested upon a separation of logical concepts and aesthetic ideas. The former were abstracted from empirical experience and could not be

used to communicate inner feeling, whereas the function of art and aesthetic ideas was to reveal inner experience. Judgments of taste and beauty were individual, not universal, and were totally different from logical judgments. For Chamberlain, art was free from the external world and the restraints of conceptual thinking; it obeyed its own laws and formed a free and independent world of its own. Though it might stimulate individual imagination, encourage liberality of mind and receptivity to ethical ideas, it could not itself supply the content of those ideas. Thus by attaching a framework of philosophical and social ideas to Wagner's art, the *Blätter* had transgressed the distinction between aesthetics and logical thinking and thereby devalued art. "We need" he wrote to Wolzogen "neither philosophical, nor moral, nor political systems. The real duty [of the *Blätter*] is to spread and extend *understanding* for true, pure Art—as it ought to arise from its temporary demise, greater and holier than before."¹²

He was especially incensed by the identification of Wagner's art with Christian concepts of regeneration, and asserted: "It would not be difficult to prove that whoever holds opposing views could just as easily believe they were represented in the *Nibelungenring*. Many who do not subscribe to the Christian dogma—but whose moral worth and search for truth is not less sincere than that of church-goers—may have felt their convictions strengthened by hearing the *Nibelungen* drama." Such ideas clashed sharply with the aesthetic religion that Bayreuth was attempting to build and they reveal the broad gulf which separated the young Chamberlain from his later viewpoint. Only a year later, in his essay "Religion and Art," Wagner set forth more clearly than ever before the nature of his aesthetic religion and its "Christian" teachings, insisting that "all real drive and effective power for realization of the great Regeneration can spring only from the deep soil of a true religion." Equally heretical was Chamberlain's dismissal of the ties between Wagner's art and Schopenhauer's philosophy, which Wolzogen and Wahnfried were carefully extending and elaborating; not only did he reject Schopenhauer as an inferior thinker to Kant, but roughly admon-

ished: "those men who in the journal lament so loudly the wickedness and indifferent materialism of the present day, should open their eyes and ask themselves what it is that has poisoned German youth, if not that pessimistic doctrine which they disseminate so enthusiastically."¹³

Wolzogen, not surprisingly, did not publish Chamberlain's essay, although he did answer the charges with a veiled reference in the next issue of the *Blätter*. In an article which exuded all the chauvinism for which the journal became famous, Wolzogen maintained: "Only the German in his deepest necessity can feel and conceive that which should lie nearest to the heart of we Germans who share in the strivings of Bayreuth." He added: "A communication from Italy from a cultivated English admirer of Wagner's art has recently confirmed once more, in a remarkable manner, the view expressed above as to the role of foreigners in our strivings."¹⁴

Wolzogen's rebuke was a profound shock to Chamberlain, who had viewed Wagnerism as a cosmopolitan aesthetic movement in which all were welcome; now it seemed he was being informed that although his financial support might be helpful, his birthplace prevented him from ever appreciating fully Wagner's art and the mission of Bayreuth. "I felt," he wrote, "as if I had been thrust out of a place which was for me like a sanctuary." His immediate response was to stop reading the *Blätter* for three years. In this time, while Chamberlain was completing his degree at Geneva, the Wagner cult was taking a more definite shape. Troubled by growing debts and conscious of his declining health, the composer labored to finish his musical testament, *Parsifal*, and, as he did so, poured out his frustrations in a series of polemical essays about racial regeneration, aesthetic religion, antivivisectionism, and the parasitical social role of Jews. Published in the *Blätter*, these essays were to set the tone of orthodox Wagnerism in the years to come; for the moment, however, they had no impact upon Chamberlain.¹⁵

Then, in 1882, Chamberlain and Anna visited Bayreuth for the first time. They saw *Parsifal* six times and were overwhelmed by the experience. "Hitherto," Chamberlain

later wrote, "my life had been so artistically barren, but now I had reached the font of the purest Art. Schiller speaks of an aesthetic culture which should combine the dignity and bliss of humanity': I have discovered the place of this culture." Now—in contrast to 1879—he was entranced by the pseudo-religiosity of Bayreuth, and fascinated by the mystical brotherhood of the Grail. Amid the camaraderie of the festival visitors and the intoxicating effect of the performances, he found himself happy as never before. To Aunt Harriet, he confessed: "I fear you will think us very Wagner-mad when we come back. My position in regard to Wagnerism, my appreciation of the fundamental idea of the music drama have greatly changed in the course of the last week." He added: "Even Wolzogen, whom I used to laugh at, states the simple truth when he says: 'with these divine harmonies, the heavenly spirit of love at once seizes the stirred hearts of the listeners, who are lifted upwards toward the divine source of the pronouncement' etc. etc. Yes 'borne upwards' that is the term; you feel as if you were being carried up to the heavens on angels' wings." His visit ended with a brief glimpse of Wagner, dining with performers in a local tavern. He returned to Geneva a convert; in the secular shrine of the festival theater Chamberlain had discovered his spiritual home.¹⁶

The following year Chamberlain returned to Bayreuth, where the atmosphere of triumph had given way to one of uncertainty and gloom. The Master had died at Venice in February, leaving the festival without a leader. There is no evidence that Wagner ever considered that his widow would step into his place, and not for years would the young Siegfried be able to take over his birthright. Wahnfried remained quiet, dark, and shuttered in mourning—in contrast to the celebrations of the previous year. Cosima shut herself off from all but her closest friends and took little part in the organization of the festival. In the absence of one dominating personality, factional squabbles soon arose between figures like Hermann Levi, the conductor, and Julius Kniese, a fanatical anti-Semite and director of the festival choir; they had always been mistrustful and jealous of each other, but now their bitter quarrels

threatened to disrupt the whole performance. But if Bayreuth seemed adrift from its moorings, it was only momentarily so: Wolzogen, Heinrich von Stein, and other leading Wagnerites responded to the crisis with a more intensive personality cult of the deceased Master and an even greater insistence on theoretical orthodoxy than Wagner himself had required. Since the early years of his career a Wagner party had clustered around the composer, but after his death an elite group, an "inner circle" of Bayreuth supporters, assumed the task of interpreting his artwork and disseminating his cultural, political, and philosophical ideals. The *Wagner-Lexikon*, published in 1883, laid down the doctrines of what Wolzogen called "the orthodox party"; in the following years emphasis upon doctrinal purity, and selfless devotion to the cause was the counterside to fears about the prospect of preserving the *Festspiele* and continuing the Master's life work.¹⁷

Chamberlain was eager to involve himself in the Bayreuth cause. At the festival in 1882 he had made the acquaintance of a number of prominent Wagnerites, and in 1883 he assiduously attended the meetings of the Patrons Association. "What occupies my thoughts most at the present moment," he told Aunt Harriet, "is the question of the future. What is to be done to insure in the first place the continuation, in the second the progress of this art." He now reckoned himself "among the small cohort of *real* Wagnerians" and sought to obtain the post of Paris representative to the Richard Wagner Association. "At any rate," he confided to his aunt, "I now know enough influential people to be sure of being in some way active in the cause of the progress of modern music."¹⁸ Having recently set up his brokerage partnership with Cerceau in Paris, he anticipated spending a large part of the year there, which would allow ample time to devote to activities for Bayreuth.

The task of the Paris representative was a delicate one, for public reaction to Wagner's works was often infused with revanchist and Germanophobe sentiments, and even the avowed defenders of Bayreuth were often divided and at odds with each other. Chamberlain was successful in his bid for the

job, a striking illustration of the confidence he was able to inspire, even in his youth, among older and more experienced men. After all, he was largely a stranger to the world of Parisian Wagnerites, and it had been only a year since he had first attended a festival and met the major personalities associated with Bayreuth. But he had a perfect command of French and German, and could, it seems, get along with both the younger literary Wagnerites and the old guard of Lascoux, Nuetter, and Lamoureux. An admirer of French and German culture, Chamberlain was eager to overstep national boundaries and foster common efforts on behalf of "the artwork of the future." It promised to be an uphill struggle. To many Frenchmen, Wagner was the hated composer of the chauvinistic *Kaisermarsch*, a *reichsdeutsche* artist who had seen in the smoking ruins of Paris the retribution for his own personal sufferings and reverses in that city. But Chamberlain, reacting against both German and French "ultrapatriotism," saw Wagner as undeservedly abused and felt that "his character like his genius was universal." During 1883 and 1884 he was active in gathering new subscribers and supporters for Bayreuth, corresponding with members of the Association, and trying to found a journal which would reach a broader audience and begin the task of opening the eyes of Frenchmen to the subtleties and full breadth of Wagner's dramas and ideas.¹⁹

These time-consuming activities may well have contributed to the failure of his business, for, as we have seen, he apparently neglected to check or supervise the transactions made by his partner until affairs had reached a crisis. Soon after, exhausted by his efforts to save the brokerage firm and distraught at his failure, he was forced to leave Paris, and it became unclear whether he should continue his role in the Wagner Association. Until spring 1885 he remained nominally the Paris representative, but prolonged absence led him to resign, although he continued to keep up a busy correspondence with Parisian friends and was even able to play a role in *La Revue Wagnérienne* which they founded. Then, gradually during his years in Dresden his interests were to shift

away from the concerns of French Wagnerism to the dissemination of the cult in Germany itself.



Chamberlain and Anna arrived in Dresden in November 1885. They lived for the next four years in a small apartment on Reichenbachstrasse, enjoying a quiet, leisured existence and travelling each year to Berlin and Bayreuth, and sometimes further afield to Schleswig and even Norway. These were years of great significance for Chamberlain's psychological and intellectual development, forming a transitional period during which he had no fixed goals in life—a prelude and preparation for his later careers of Wagner publicist and cultural prophet.

Convinced by his doctors that his health could not withstand a scientific career, his future seemed empty and unclear. Recovery from his breakdown was the first task, and Chamberlain adopted a careful daily regime which would speed his recuperation. After frequent consultations with doctors in Berlin, and nursed attentively by Anna, he soon grew stronger and became more active, especially in the business of the local Wagner club. All his financial needs were met by relatives in England, although Chamberlain sometimes complained that his style of life was misunderstood by some, at any rate, of his family. "I am positively incapable of work," he wrote in 1886 to Aunt Harriet, "and yet my sufferings are such, and of such a nature, that nobody considers me a sick man, a patient, an invalid. Nobody sympathizes with a man who 'goes to the theater'! who is told to travel and amuse himself as medicine; I have never for one moment doubted that most 'people' look upon me simply as an unmitigated humbug."²⁰ The absence of medical evidence and lack of any but the most fragmentary accounts prevents us from saying more about the nature of his sickness; but what is important is that he was sufficiently well to read extensively and to take an active role in the affairs of Bayreuth. He had more free time than most contemporaries to

devote to self-education and to Wagner.²¹ Gradually, over the next four years he began to write and by 1889 had taken the first steps toward his literary career.

Anna was his constant companion in these years, but she is scarcely mentioned in the following pages. For, though they read and travelled together, she cannot be said to have influenced greatly the development of Chamberlain's ideas. She helped him in his work, attended to his wants, and took up his interests. Her life revolved entirely around his, and her autobiographical reflections contain no hint as to her opinions and thoughts—only those of her husband. It was Cosima Wagner, Countess Coudenhove, Baroness von Schleinitz, the members of the Wahnfried circle, and other Wagnerites whom he met at performances that influenced Chamberlain. They recommended books to him, discussed their interpretations of Kant and Schopenhauer, and told him their political views. Anna's letters have not survived and Chamberlain's comments about her are perfunctory and usually concern her health or domestic details. It would seem that in Dresden, as later in Vienna, he kept her out of certain areas of his life: and as he drew closer to the leading circles of Wagnerism, so he entered a social world in which Anna never really participated.

Dresden had, of course, old and deep associations with Richard Wagner. It was here, as royal *Kapellmeister* that he first staged *Rienzi*, *Fliegende Holländer*, and *Tannhäuser*, and completed *Lohengrin*. Dresden had also been the scene of his revolutionary involvement in 1849 and of his first schemes for a national theater. When Chamberlain arrived the town had a small but flourishing Wagner society, some of whose members, like the sculptor Ernst Kietz, had been close friends and supporters of the composer. During his visits to the *Festspiele*, Chamberlain came into contact with a wide circle of friends and, encouraged by some of them, he began to try his hand as a publicist. At first, in spite of his geographical separation from Paris, he saw himself as a mediator between Bayreuth and the French public. Even as late as 1889 he was contemplating a French translation of Wagner's prose writings and sought a publisher in Paris.²² But, for the most part, by 1887 the first "French phase" of his activities was over; from then

on, as he became numbered among the trusted friends of Wahnfried, he turned his attention away from France toward Germany. This coincided with significant changes in his views on art, society, and politics, and reflected the general tendency of Bayreuth to identify itself more and more with German nationalism of the *völkisch* kind.

Chamberlain's place in the development of French Wagnerism is closely connected with the journal *Revue Wagnérienne*. At the *Festspiele* in 1883 he met Edouard Dujardin, a young French writer who had studied music under Debussy and Dukas and was eager to publicize Wagner's dramas in France. They became friends and saw each other again in Munich in the following year, where the *Ring* was being performed. Together with another acquaintance, Theodor de Wyzewa, they discussed the possibility of founding a French journal modelled after the *Bayreuther Blätter*. Wagner's music and writings were little known in France and since the fiasco of Napoleon III's *Tannhäuser* in March 1861 (the lavish performance had been disrupted by members of the Jockey Club, largely for political purposes) only fragments of the dramas had been performed. Even these were often the scene of disorders, sometimes mounted by extreme nationalist groups and at others by those intolerant on aesthetic grounds of the "music of the future."²³ "The management of the Société des Nouveaux Concerts," so explained the program for *Tristan und Isolde* in 1885, "is desirous of avoiding any disturbance . . . and urgently and respectfully begs that the audience will abstain from giving any mark of their approval or disapproval before the end of the act."²⁴ Since the 1860s a small coterie of intellectuals—among them Baudelaire, Auguste de Gasperini, Théophile Gautier, Catulle Mendès, and Gérard de Nerval—had rallied to Wagner's defense. But even these champions were often surprisingly ignorant of the dramas and their underlying aesthetic. They were seldom able to attend performances abroad, and were in most cases unequipped linguistically to study the librettos and prose writings in depth. "In 1884," Dujardin explained, Wagnerism "was a new world

which had to be discovered" by the French intellectuals. The new *Revue Wagnérienne* would, it was hoped, remedy this ignorance.²⁵ As the Paris representative of the Wagner Association, Chamberlain gave the venture an air of authenticity, and through his connections he was soon able to interest several wealthy patrons, including the prominent Parisian Wagnerite Judge Lascoux, the Belgian industrialist Alfred Bovet, and an old friend of Chamberlain's, the Genevan millionaire Agénor Boissier.

The editors of the projected *Revue* began soliciting support from Parisian writers and Wagnerites. Dujardin arranged a banquet attended by Lamoureux, Victor Wilder, Léon Leroy, and many other leading figures, while Wyzewa made the rounds of the Paris cafés. Stephane Mallarmé had recently returned to Paris from the provinces and gathered a group of disciples around him. Dujardin and Wyzewa soon became regular visitors to his Tuesday evening soirées at 89 rue de Rome, proselytizing and searching for further recruits for their journal. Their visions were grandiose. Dujardin declared his intention of preparing new improved translations of Wagner's works and of breaking down the barriers of existing language. Heavily influenced by his friend, Chamberlain tried to explain to Aunt Harriet: "A language must live, must be capable of adapting itself to the wants of a new generation. . . . and those who stand as we do, at the early dawn of a new epoch, of a reaction of idealism against materialism, of poetry against science—call it what you will—those men must all forge the language in which their ideas can be expressed."²⁶

Wyzewa, meantime, claimed that the *Revue* would bring order to modern aesthetics and give some cohesion to the varying tendencies prevailing in current literature: to this end he proposed a series of articles that would relate Wagner's work to contemporary literary movements, and analyze the moral purpose of art. Chamberlain shared the lofty aims of his two co-founders and was, in addition, anxious that the *Revue* create a large and unified bloc of French support for Bayreuth; but—after their initial discussions—he could offer relatively little assistance both because of his business difficulties, which demanded most of his time and energy, and the subsequent

collapse of his health. Nonetheless he aided Dujardin with preparations for the first issue and kept in close correspondence with his Paris associates. Gradually, as his health improved he began writing notes on Wagnerism in Germany, reviewed performances in Central Europe, and eventually contributed longer articles on several of the music dramas. But more important, perhaps, than his essays, was his role as mediator between the avant-garde of literary Wagnerism and the more traditional and conservative Wagnerites who financed the *Revue*, for sharp differences soon arose.

Wagner's significance for the artistic avant-garde in France was vague and confused. Poets like Philippe Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, Valéry, Laforgue, and Mallarmé believed they had discovered in Wagner a kindred worshipper of the religion of Art who shared their particular aesthetic views and whose works provided a wealth of myths and symbols to evoke inner experience and illuminate their revolt against bourgeois philistinism and the sterility of modern society. Through Wagnerism the Symbolists tried to extract from the German Idealists, and especially from Schopenhauer, a philosophical and aesthetic basis for their movement. Wagner, they asserted, had translated these abstract philosophical ideas into forms of beauty and emotion. The "Artwork of the Future" had a mighty appeal and even the level-headed succumbed readily to its spell. "Writers," wrote Romain Rolland, "not only discussed musical subjects but judged painting, literature, and philosophy from a Wagnerian point of view. . . . The whole universe was seen and judged in the light of Bayreuth."²⁷ Another contemporary warned years later: "The men of today can absolutely never grasp what Wagner . . . was for us, the vast expanse of light which his magic opened to us, the ground swell [*lame de fond*] he aroused in our souls, the dreadful disgust he imposed on us for everything that was not his."²⁸ *Revue Wagnérienne* rapidly became the Bible of the avant-garde, the focus of literary Wagnerism and Symbolism; its appearance in February 1885 marked the dawning of a new era, just as the burial of Victor Hugo two months later more ostentatiously epitomized the passing of the old. A list of contributors to the 36 issues which appeared in the next three years attests to the significance of

the journal, but it was precisely these strong literary associations which made the *Revue* a subject of bitter controversy. It is arguable, indeed, that far from unifying French Wagnerism, as Chamberlain hoped, the journal hastened its division into opposing factions.²⁹

While Wolzogen's *Bayreuther Blätter* excluded all but the orthodox Wagnerian view, Dujardin proved unable to impose a rigid editorial direction on his publication and it soon encompassed many divergent opinions. Though in its first months the *Revue* included lengthy discussions and analysis of Wagner's ideas, musicologists and conservative Parisian Wagnerites became increasingly restive at the use of Wagner's name to justify all manner of literary experimentation. Even in early issues, essays such as Mallarmé's "*Richard Wagner, Reverie d'un poète français*" failed to mention a single music drama or passage from the composer's prose writings; then, in January 1886, eight sonnets to Wagner appeared whose perfervid, decadent style was scandalous to more traditional minds. Not surprisingly, by September Agénor Boissier and other financial backers were fast losing their patience and made it clear "that, if they were willing to support *Revue Wagnérienne*, it was because it published studies of Wagner and not Symbolist poems."³⁰

The feud developed rapidly. Dujardin and Wyzewa levelled vehement criticism at Lamoureux and Wagner's French translator, Victor Wilder, for obscuring the true meaning of the dramas. Chamberlain supported Dujardin throughout these disputes, and collaborated on a translation of *Rheingold*, together with some introductory notes, parts of which were published in the *Revue*. Their opposition, of course, regarded the translation as too "decadent." After months of dissension, Bovet and Boissier, encouraged by Lamoureux, withdrew their financial support and the journal closed down at the end of 1887. A last farewell issue was printed later, in July 1888 (to which Chamberlain contributed) and then most of the *Revue's* supporters shifted their allegiance to Dujardin's new venture, the *Revue Indépendante* whose editorial policy called explicitly for toleration.³¹

In spite of its brief life, *Revue Wagnérienne* was ex-

tremely important in cultivating Wagnerism in France. Its influence left a deep imprint on the poets and artists of the *fin de siècle*, although Jacques Barzun exaggerates when he suggests that "it left Paris almost more Wagnerian than the home of the Master."³² The articles of Dujardin and Wyzewa were among the first careful and informed analyses of Wagner's works in France, and while Chamberlain at first provided only summaries of Wagner news from Germany, he soon after—at Dujardin's prompting—contributed longer studies of *Lohengrin*, *Tristan*, and *Götterdämmerung*. Detailed and meticulous, his essays revealed a considerable knowledge of Wagner's art works and prose writings, as well as the growing corpus of secondary literature. The main emphasis of these writings was psychological: like the Symbolists, he found in Wagner's balance of tone and word (in fact he coined the word *Wortton-drama*) a perfect means of communication between the subjective, unconscious realm and the objective world. Wagner was a poet who had turned to music as the only means of recapturing inner psychological experience. But Chamberlain remained unmoved by the philosophical mysteries elaborated by Wyzewa and by Wolzogen's vision of Wagner as an intuitive Schopenhauerean. In words reminiscent of his first irascible essay of 1879, he berated those "who pretend to discover in Wagner's dramas religion, political systems, and philosophies." He added: "If Tristan and Isolde are interpreters of Schopenhauer's theory, one can see they have it backwards; it is simpler and truer to avow they have nothing to do with it." As for Wagner's final work, the man who later became an apostle of Aryan Christianity wrote: "There is no more Christianity in *Parsifal* than there is paganism in the *Ring* and *Tristan*."³³ Thus, while concurring in many details with Bayreuth's interpretation of Wagner, Chamberlain—at least when he wrote for Frenchmen—did not echo the distinctly Christian and national political chords that were being struck by German Wagnerites. Parisian Wagnerism was aesthetic rather than Christian or political, and the *Revue's* significance, in Dujardin's words, lay in providing "the connecting link between Wagner and Mallarmé, between Schopenhauer and Symbolism . . . it helped the Symbolists of 1886 to take note of the deep musical necessity which imposed itself on them."³⁴

If Chamberlain's first "phase" of Wagner activities ended with the demise of the *Revue*, the second began almost at once with the publication of his first essays in the German language and his movement closer to the Wahnfried circle.

Since 1883 the Bayreuth cult had been establishing itself, presided over by Cosima who had emerged from mourning to provide forceful leadership. She was assisted by a remarkable group of young men—mostly in their twenties or early thirties—who worshipped Wagner's memory. These faithful lieutenants—Wolzogen, Glasenapp, Schemann, Stein, and Thode especially—sought to expound for the German public their interpretation of what Wagner's art and vision meant, and to discredit all variant opinions. Wolzogen, in particular, was interested in the expansion of Wagner societies which, he hoped, would act as oases of Germanic values amid "the desert of modern materialism."³⁵ To coordinate the activities of the more than 100 branches of the *Wagner-Verein* and to supervise the literary campaign, an "inner circle" or elite of Bayreuth supporters grew up whose members were highly conscious of their special place in the cult. Needless to say the heavy emotional and religious atmosphere of the Wahnfried circle was very different from that surrounding *Revue Wagnérienne*.

The essays Chamberlain wrote for the *Revue* had attracted some notice in Bayreuth, but it was only in 1888, with the publication of his first German article, that his potential as a publicist was recognized. The essay was a detailed analysis of the relationship of music and poetry in *Tristan und Isolde*, which illustrated the orthodox view that all Wagner's dramas embodied the same basic artistic conception and the same reciprocal relationships of the various arts within the *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Elated by its success, Chamberlain jubilantly reported to Aunt Harriet:

My German article on the language in Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* has created quite a sensation among the people who study these matters. . . . The greatest philological authority on these questions, Baron von Wolzogen, who has himself studied *Tristan* specially and written on it, assures me that it is a revelation to him. Madame Cosima Wagner herself—the severest authority—says it is "remarkable" and it was Hofkapellmeister Levi, the celebrated Bayreuth leader, who I have for

long been on bad terms with, who was so "*begeistert*" that he insisted upon her reading it.³⁶

This was his first step toward Wahnfried; the second came with the publication of a brief newspaper article dealing with the relationship between Wagner and Cosima's father, Franz Liszt. It was prompted by an attack on Wagner, delivered in a lecture to the Dresden Music Society, by Moritz Wirth, an anti-Semitic publicist and right-wing social reformer, who had once been close to Wahnfried but had moved into opposition. With a delicate combination of fact and eulogy Chamberlain asserted that Wagner had always been frank in acknowledging his debts to Liszt. The implication was that Cosima and Wahnfried had been similarly generous: a reply to the considerable criticism aroused by her cold and almost indifferent response to the death of her father at the Bayreuth festival of 1886.³⁷

The timing of Chamberlain's essays was opportune, for the high priestess of the cult was looking for new talent. In 1887, the death of Heinrich von Stein, a brilliant young philosopher who had taken the post of tutor to Wagner's son, Siegfried, deprived Bayreuth of its most able protagonist and thinker. At the same time, another of the young Wahnfried supporters, Ludwig Schemann, who later became one of the chief race publicists in Central Europe, began to drift apart from Cosima's circle, uncomfortable in so confining an intellectual environment.³⁸ Stein's death and Schemann's gradual defection dealt a hard blow to Wagnerism, and Cosima was overjoyed at the emergence of Chamberlain as a vigorous champion of the cause. They met in June 1888 in the Dresden home of the Kietz family. The encounter was a great success and the beginning of a long and devoted friendship; it also marked, as Wolzogen quickly noted in a congratulatory letter, Chamberlain's formal induction into the "inner circle" of Wagnerites.³⁹

Chamberlain was overcome with admiration for this tall, gaunt woman with her regal airs and penetrating gaze, who over the years was to have an enormous influence upon his personal life and intellectual development.⁴⁰ It is difficult to re-

capture the exaggerated awe with which she was regarded by the votaries of the Bayreuth cult. On the face of things she seemed to contradict in many ways the dominant bourgeois ideals and conventions, although under her guidance Wagnerism became associated with a national cult that was strongly bourgeois. Born the illegitimate daughter of Franz Liszt and a French noblewoman, Countess Marie d'Agoult, Cosima was raised as a strict Catholic and converted to Protestantism only in 1872. After marrying her father's favorite pupil, Hans von Bülow, she left him for Wagner by whom she had three children. The scandal of their relationship echoed throughout Germany and continued later to be an awkward subject for many Wagnerites. Only recently, with the long delayed publication of her voluminous diaries, has it become clear just how traumatic and guilt-provoking her leaving Bülow was—anguish, bad dreams, and pangs of conscience about her children constantly recur in her daily entries.

Cosima's devotion to Wagner was total, all consuming; while he lived she accepted his conviction that "woman has nothing to do with the outside world," although her influence on his last works, and especially upon the racial and religious turn of his thought in those final years, was probably great. Much about her is mysterious and will undoubtedly remain so. The origin of her anti-Semitism is, for example, obscure: as Bülow's wife she had mixed freely with Ferdinand Lassalle, Karl Varnhagen von Ense, whose Jewish wife, Rahel, had presided over one of the most brilliant literary salons, and various prominent Jews in Berlin, but by 1862 she was outspoken in her prejudice. Some authors have asserted that Cosima's bigotry arose in part from nagging anxieties about her own pedigree and her family connection to the Frankfurt banking family of Bethmann; but, like so much else about her, this is mere speculation. To Chamberlain and his contemporaries, this dedicated recluse, accessible only to her trusted advisors, was an exceptional woman, conspicuous for the power she exerted in the German musical world and consumed by the task of advancing Wagner's work. Strong-willed, intelligent though intellectually somewhat narrow, she was unquestionably the driving force behind the Wagner cult.

"Cosima," wrote the equally tough-minded Elizabeth Förster-Nietzsche, "has for me always been the personification of will and a longing for power in the noblest sense of the word."⁴¹

Wagnerites saw her in several ways. At times she was a woman, frail and lonely, who needed guidance to perform the duties which had been bequeathed to her. "It is impossible," wrote the Austrian Wagnerite, Friedrich von Hausegger, in a rather critical letter to Wolzogen "that a woman, no matter how gifted . . . or energetic, or willing to make sacrifices (all that is present)—could embrace the broad horizons of a man like Wagner. . . . I wish I were wrong. But many . . . many . . . think like me."⁴² Her enemies and critics, beginning with Nietzsche, invariably used her sex as a means of explaining alleged distortions in the interpretation and staging of Wagner's art. "Seldom," admitted Chamberlain soon after their first meeting, "has a woman had to play so crucial a role in the development of the human mind and spirit [Geist]"; but, he added reassuringly, "you know it and are up to it." When further criticism of Cosima's authority over the festival was raised in 1891, he wrote to a Wagnerite friend in Dresden:

It is certain that any artistic undertaking can only find life in *one* person—for this reason I don't believe that the group will of a number of gifted people can compensate for one excellent individual. We are so fortunate (in spite of all the narrow-minded and spiteful attacks) to possess an exceptionally gifted leader of the *Festspiele* who knows, moreover, the intentions of the Bayreuth Master like no second person on earth and who took an outstanding part in the festivals of 76 and 82. That the present leader is a woman should also be seen as a downright blessing: first because she clings, with a piety that only the most self-sacrificing love can inspire, to the intentions of her immortalized husband. . . . and secondly because those most highly gifted men who properly constitute the "general staff" of Bayreuth—Kniese, Mottl, Levi, Humperdinck etc. and also the singers—are *happy* to subordinate themselves to Frau Wagner. So, let's thank God and hope that He will also watch over the great cause of the highest art in the future.⁴³

Her supporters generally overcame attacks on Cosima's abilities as a woman by elevating her to the position of a divine



Cosima Wagner, c. 1877

priestess through whom breathed the will and spirit of the composer himself. In their cult of Wagner's widow the Wahnfried circle broke all bounds; witness, for example, the tone of adulation in Chamberlain's words in 1896:

Among us closer associates it is regarded as a pious rule that we should not in public speak the name of the person who from now on placed not half but her entire strength in the service of the festival. The reasons for this attitude are embedded in the heart, in the soul, and permit no discussion.⁴⁴

Unsympathetic toward the "new woman," both in reality and in fiction; too healthy, as she once expressed it, for Ibsen, Cosima left her signature on every aspect of the Bayreuth cult—by claiming that she alone understood fully the will and the aims of Wagner.

After his very first meeting with her Chamberlain confessed to Wolzogen: "I never suspected she would from the first meeting be for me what nobody else could be. Respect and admiration for her I had already—but now I have what is infinitely more—the deepest love. That she possesses such strength and such youthful freshness of spirit has filled me with hope for our cause." "Her presence," he once told Aunt Harriet, "makes one always feel as if one had been suddenly transported to some other planet"; she "electrified" those who approached her.⁴⁵ Though rather more restrained in her tone, Cosima was also pleased with her new recruit and wrote to her good friend and confidante, Baroness Wolkenstein: "I am now in close contact with Chamberlain for whom I have come to feel a great friendship because of his outstanding learning and dignified character."⁴⁶

Impressed by his abilities she soon began delegating tasks to him, including the delicate mission of collecting the correspondence between Wagner and his friend the Dresden violinist Theodor Uhlig. As she planned to publish an expurgated version of the letters, Cosima was anxious that all the evidence be safely under her control. "That I entrust you and nobody else with this commission," she told Chamberlain, "will perhaps say everything to you." He responded eagerly to such requests and was soon visited by her once more in Dresden;

invitations to stay at Wahnfried and also to attend festival rehearsals soon followed. Their mutual sympathy and admiration ripened into warm friendship, as shown in the frequent letters between them, in which they exchanged ideas, gossip, and personal confessions; long before Chamberlain moved permanently to Bayreuth in 1908, Cosima had come to regard him as almost a son.⁴⁷

Growing contact with the "inner circle" at Bayreuth exerted a great influence upon Chamberlain's view of the role of Wagnerism as well as his social and political outlook. From surviving sources it is difficult to trace exactly the transformation of his ideas, but his meeting with Cosima seems to mark an important transition. Until 1886 Chamberlain had espoused a basically Kantian position whereby art was considered a free and separate world beyond conceptual thought and having no specific philosophical or religious content. By 1889 he was moving closer to Wagnerian ideas of man's redemption through art and began to view art as anchored in the *Volk* and religion. Reading Schleiermacher, Novalis, Friedrich Schlegel, and E. T. A. Hoffmann, Chamberlain began to break with the Kantian emphasis on a Newtonian moral law as the goal of human development and to stress the cultivation of distinctive national personalities as the true aim of ethical endeavor. He drew upon Romantic ideas about collective folk personalities, which found expression in *völkisch* or populist art. Art became the incarnation of national genius and also the inspiration for an alternative aesthetic social ideal quite different from existing reality. In a continual dialogue with his German Wagnerite friends and in his correspondence with Cosima, Chamberlain gradually moved away from the cosmopolitan, aesthetic stance he had shared with Dujardin.

While he continued to admire Mallarmé and the Symbolists he nonetheless felt them too fastidious of life, too narcissistic; he was deeply moved by that apotheosis of the *fin de siècle*, Huysman's *A rebours*, but rejected its hero's wish "to hide himself away, far from the world, in some retreat, where he might deaden the sound of the loud rumbling of inflexible life as one covers the street with straw for sick people."

The solution for the malady of the age was not aesthetic

withdrawal and the elevation of the Beautiful rather than Being to the rank of Absolute.⁴⁸ Not denial of life but regeneration and the ennoblement of man through imaginative truth: this was the message of Bayreuth. "I cannot avoid the conviction that German art is ordained for a special and especially exalted mission in the history of mankind." "Never," Chamberlain insisted, "have the truly great among Germany's poets in words and tones wished to content themselves with *l'art pour les artistes*." Unlike the self-absorbed French avant-garde, German artists, rooted in the soil of the *Volk*, sought "to awaken the artistic element in man to conscious life, to arouse and develop it, impelled by the conviction that they thereby brought to fruition something important as a national work and significant for the culture of all mankind."⁴⁹

It was especially in Schiller's *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* that Chamberlain discovered an intellectual bridge between Kant and the socially regenerative mission of art espoused by Bayreuth. A favorite with Bayreuth "initiates," the work replaced the rigorous Kantian emphasis on duty with a doctrine of aesthetic humanism, contrasting the unity and harmony of ancient Greek society with the division of the modern age. In Schiller Chamberlain found a penetrating analysis of cultural evolution, which coincided with his own growing critique of industrial and commercial society, and a poignant analysis of the plight of modern man who, in Schiller's words, "grew to be only a fragment . . . and instead of imprinting humanity upon his nature . . . becomes merely an imprint of his occupation, of his science." Schiller's concept of Art as the unifying agency that could overcome the self-divisions, conflicts, and fragmentation in man's mental and social world had become—with varying shades of interpretation—a central tenet of the Romantics. For Chamberlain, Wagner's art fulfilled Schiller's ideal. By reconciling man's sensuous inclinations and moral will, it could produce the *schöne Seele*, harmonious, morally sensitive, and unalienated. Bayreuth offered a vision of man redeemed, restored through the twin integrating myths of Art and Volk. Writing somewhat later, Chamberlain expressed succinctly the conviction he had arrived at during his Dresden years:

Every German who is concerned about the cause, should bind together Schiller's *Briefe über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen* and Wagner's *Religion und Kunst*. He should continually immerse himself in these works and model himself upon their spirit and teaching. My deepest conviction at least, is that not German politicians but these two poets have pointed the way to the German *Volk*. They have shown the path the *Volk* must tread if it is to fulfil its mission, if it is to bring to fruition its particular "spirit of pure humanity," "the infinitely important plan which Nature wills for her redemption" (as Wagner expressed it). Yes, I go so far as to find Schiller and Wagner indispensable for a full, comprehensive understanding of the German regeneration doctrine.⁵⁰

How Chamberlain and Bayreuth interpreted "German regeneration" will be shown in a later chapter; for the moment it is sufficient to point out that his Wagnerism and his other views became "Germanized" during the four years he spent in Dresden. "For the decisive movement of my life," he later wrote, "was towards *Deutschtum*. I attached myself to the German system—if I may be permitted an astronomical image—and at its center stood Richard Wagner."⁵¹

The evolution of his ideas mirrored the development of a more strident national cult in Bayreuth in the 1880s. And yet *Festspiele* performances always—until the Nazi years—drew an international crowd and Cosima was known, and sometimes criticized for, her willingness to engage foreign artists for major roles. Thomas Mann once described the "Germanness" of Wagner's music as "deep, powerful, unquestionable" but added with his usual acuity: it "has many traits which *foreigners in particular* find German."⁵² This was true of many non-German Wagnerites—Bayreuth embodied their vision of the admirable qualities of German *Kultur*. Yet the reconciliation of the chauvinist and international sides of Bayreuth was not always so simple and Wolzogen at times found himself confusedly referring to "a musical association of national and supra-national character." At times Bayreuth could shelter behind cultural imperialism, and the German mission to be the ennoblers of mankind; at others, Cosima and her circle made good use of the racial ideas of Count Gobineau, tacitly viewing true Wagnerites

as a kind of European elite of superior moral and racial characteristics. Certainly, Chamberlain was forced to ponder the relationship between French and English Wagnerism and what he increasingly felt to be a basically German artwork—but his conclusions were vague and ill-formed in this transitional stage of his development. His ideas grew clearer as he developed his own racial theories in the next decade.



As a student in Geneva, Chamberlain followed closely the politics of Britain, France, and Switzerland. He read *The Times* and French newspapers regularly, occasionally attended debates in the Swiss parliament, and frequently discussed politics with friends and family. With regard to England he approached issues from a firmly Gladstonian perspective and showed a marked antipathy to the philosophy and policies of Conservatism. Perhaps the best way to illustrate his outlook is to examine briefly his opinions on two of the chief issues facing the new Liberal government in 1880–1881: Ireland and South Africa. In both cases his correspondence records a continuing clash between his convictions and those of his family, who deplored what they regarded as Gladstone's vacillation and weakness.

The combination of agricultural depression, bad harvests, and neglect by the previous Conservative government had created a mounting crisis on the land in Ireland. In April 1881 Gladstone introduced a new Land Bill designed to fix "fair" rents, grant tenants greater security of tenure, and alleviate some of the distress caused by the massive increase in evictions by landlords. In effect the bill proposed to recognize legislatively a difference in property rights between England and Ireland; it immediately prompted strong opposition from the Conservatives, as well as deep disquiet among the Whig aristocrats of the Liberal Party who feared that the precedent might well be applied elsewhere. Chamberlain studied the land question carefully: he read Royal Commission reports,

absorbed available newspaper and magazine articles, and kept informed of the debate in the Commons. Sympathetic toward the plight of the Irish peasantry, he soon found himself at odds with his relatives, including Sir Neville Chamberlain, who deplored the bill as a violation of sacred property rights and an unpardonable breach of trust. Houston, however, insisted that the Liberal proposal was both practical and just. Not only had landlord intransigence wrecked earlier, more moderate legislation but even the claims of Anglo-Irish absentees to ownership was questionable:

the tenants are the *real, original proprietors*. The holdings have remained for centuries in the same families and all that they are worth is due to the toil and sweat of these occupants whereas the landlords are successors of real spoliators who stepped in and forced the original proprietors to pay what may be called a tax on their property. As I understand it, Gladstone cannot be said "to confiscate the landlords' rights" (as Uncle Neville puts it); on the contrary he admits their proprietorship and draws a veil over all the iniquities of the past. What he does is to admit and enforce *tenants rights* . . . and if this does impose sacrifices upon the present landlords, it is only just to put the unrighteous gain of centuries in the other scale of the balance.⁵³

To the idea of increased compensation for landowners, he answered angrily: "Compensation for those blood-sucking Jews who have trebled their fortunes by unjust means; one might talk of compensation to the people who have been cheated for so many years."⁵⁴

When his English relatives wrote furiously of the methods of parliamentary obstruction practiced by Irish MPs at Westminster as a means of resisting coercion measures, Chamberlain insisted that these tactics had matured only after long provocation. "The policy of Parnell and Co.," he wrote to Aunt Harriet, "I quite agree to be unjustifiable but I well remember that not many years ago, when an Irish member got up, the House used systematically to ignore him and either members began conversing or walked out; at least they have forced Parliament to listen to them."⁵⁵

More disturbing to him were the reckless and irresponsible

filibustering tactics of a small Conservative "ginger group" led by Lord Randolph Churchill whose noisy interruptions of House business during the time-wasting Bradlaugh imbroglio reflected the extent to which Disraeli's legacy had debased and coarsened English political life. On the Conservative benches he had respect only for Sir Stafford Northcote—in many ways the real target of Churchill.

As a good Gladstonian, Chamberlain's real *bête noire* was Disraeli, the man whom he blamed in large measure for the injection of selfish class interest and jingoism into British public life in the next decades. He backed Gladstone's efforts to liquidate Conservative foreign policy by disengaging from "forward" positions in South Africa and Afghanistan, where Disraeli's efforts to stabilize volatile political situations had led to growing involvement, expense, and finally failure. After annexing the Transvaal in 1878, for example, Britain faced a growing revolt among the Boer farmers. Once again opposed to the pro-imperial views of his family, Chamberlain wholeheartedly endorsed the Liberal decision to restore Boer independence and praised Gladstone's moderation even after the massacre of an English detachment of troops at Majuba Hill. "If we had not men like Gladstone," he argued, "one might well doubt of the existence of 'English love of justice and truth.'" He looked forward to intermarriage and closer ties between the Boers and British settlers in Cape Colony, and predicted that eventually this would lay the foundation "to one of those vigorous nationalities such as have always sprung up from the intermixture of races."⁵⁶

Both Chamberlain's sympathy with the Irish peasantry and his hatred for aggressive British imperialism anticipated his later attitudes. Twenty years later he largely blamed the decay of English politics and the heightened competition between imperial nations on misguided Conservative policies, although by then he explained the trend more elaborately in terms of racial degeneration and the dominance of moneyed interests. Chamberlain never subjected Prussian Junkers to the same scrutiny as the Anglo-Irish landlords, nor did he examine German *Weltpolitik* with the same critical eye as British expansionism in southern Africa.

Outside England as well Chamberlain favored liberal politics. He admired, for example, the liberal republicans in France and particularly Gambetta whose death he characterized as "a disaster for the whole nation, perhaps all of Europe."⁵⁷ Also, for a time, after the assassination of Czar Alexander II, he even seemed somewhat sympathetic to the Russian anarchists living in Switzerland—again causing some consternation among his relatives. Sending a pamphlet by Dragomanov, the Ukrainian anarchist, to London, he added the comment: "You will see how little ferocious the man is, who is credited with being the head of the revolutionary party." In another letter he urged Aunt Harriet to "Tell Uncle N[eville] that in sending him *Revolté*, I didn't think or suppose anything about his political opinions—but merely wanted to give him an opportunity of forming a judgment at first hand on those held by the best sort of present socialists—for the *Revolté*, unlike *Revolution Sociale*, the *Ni Dieu ni Maître*, and many others is a paper which counts Elisée Reclus and other savants among its editors."⁵⁸

He had met Reclus in Geneva and had a great respect for the famous geographer and friend of Kropotkin who ten years before had taken part in the Commune. It is difficult to judge how deep Chamberlain's understanding of such thinkers went or to what extent he accepted socialist and anarchist theories. More than likely he was chiefly drawn, like so many contemporaries, to the anarchist critique of bourgeois values and conventions; this was compatible, at any rate, with his growing enthusiasm for Wagner. Even in later years, however, he still admired the works of Proudhon—"one of the most acute minds of the century"—and identified with his attacks on Mammonism and condemnation of Jews and financiers. "I find many points of contact," he wrote in 1895, "between the Wagner-Schiller mode of thought and the anarchism of Proudhon."⁵⁹

It was as an inhabitant of Dresden that Chamberlain first experienced life in the German Reich. He had visited the country before and was educated in the German cultural tradition, but now he confronted the everyday reality of Bis-

marckian Germany. This period of four years was, in fact, his only sustained contact with the Reich until 1908, when he settled in Bayreuth, although most of his writing in the intervening two decades was directed toward German readers. First impressions are important and Chamberlain's vision of Germany was that of a Wagnerite; his outlook on contemporary social and political issues was influenced deeply by the attitudes prevalent at Bayreuth as well as the situation in Dresden and Saxony. The result was a dramatic shift in his opinions away from the liberalism of his Genevan period.

The German Empire in which Chamberlain lived was a society in the throes of rapid social and economic change. Alongside the old Germany of princes, nobles, and peasants was emerging a new one of industrialists, financiers, corporation managers, trade unionists, and proletarians. The Wars of Unification had forged the most formidable concentration of military and economic power on the Continent, but the new nation was deeply divided and faced staggering tasks of social and psychological adjustment. Regional rivalries continued, and confessional and class tensions were accentuated in the first decade of the Empire; Prussian hegemony interfered with efforts to create national unity, and the attempt to fasten a traditional authoritarian political order to a dynamic industrializing society promised continuing friction and conflict. Instead of a period of tranquil domestic development, the first years of the Reich were a frenzy of speculation and overexpansion—the so-called *Gründerjahre* when the old order seemed to retreat suddenly before a culture that was ostentatious, brash, and obsessed by money. To conservative critics and those who identified with a pre-industrial order, the heroic era of battlefield victories had created a secular and selfish nation whose commercial success signified a collapse of values and spiritual impoverishment. Then, in 1873, revelations of company frauds and a weakening of public confidence precipitated a wave of selling; the stock market plunged, wiping out share values overnight, and the country experienced a sharp depression. The repercussions of the slump are well known. In politics Bismarck shifted the balance of forces dramatically, abandoning his partnership with the National Liberals and forming a con-

servative alliance of agrarian and industrial interests around the principles of economic protection and opposition to socialism. Culturally the crash prompted a wave of self-questioning and a vehement critique of contemporary society and capitalist values. The Germany that Chamberlain got to know in the mid 1880s—conservative, troubled, and divided as well as aggressively nationalist and posturing—had been forged in this climate of crisis.⁶⁰

Generally speaking, Chamberlain became within the space of two or three years a firm opponent of liberalism. Like many other Wagnerites he was preoccupied by what he saw as a complete divorce between the German state and German culture; the nation he insisted had yet to find a distinctive political form. Rejecting the existing political establishment and its party structure, he called for a “spiritualizing” of public life and embraced a vague idealism that vented itself in exaggerated praise for the monarchy and authoritarian bureaucracy. While he admired Bismarck, Chamberlain concurred with Wagner’s opinion that the Chancellor had allowed himself to become too entangled in electoral and factional politics.* “I honor and love Germany as the birth-place and home of much of what is best and greatest and most beautiful,” he told Aunt Harriet, “but I don’t believe the present . . . political system is an adequate expression of German thought and feeling.”⁶¹ Summing up his standpoint in 1889, he referred to himself as “a thorough conservative—but not in the party sense of the word.”⁶²

The most important change in Chamberlain’s opinions during these Dresden years was his growing anti-Semitism. Hitherto anti-Jewish slurs and jokes had been interjected in

* One aspect of Bismarck’s policy that troubled Chamberlain deeply was the Chancellor’s manipulation of Anglophobia. “You must not believe,” he informed Uncle Neville in 1889 after a particularly strident official campaign, “that the present attitude of the Germans toward England is anything new. The government has been preparing this for years through the medium of the press.” “The violence and general tone of such a paper as the *Dresdener Nachrichten* towards England—always, not only now—a well bred Englishman can scarcely picture to himself. And this paper is read daily by the 150,000 inhabitants of this town.” The same animosity, he added, could be heard in the schools where children were “brought up . . . to mistrust and dislike, and in a measure to *despise* England.” HSC to Sir Neville Chamberlain, Jan. 13, 1889 (CN).

his letters in a sporadic and unsystematic way; he might deplore Jewish finance or refer to Anglo-Irish landlords as "blood sucking Jews," but his prejudice was vague and not very coherent. Now, influenced both by the intolerant atmosphere of Bayreuth and the mood in Germany as a whole, he began to weave anti-Semitism consciously into his whole political and cultural outlook. Chamberlain's repudiation of liberal norms and institutions was couched in the language of race: the Jew became the symbol for all that he loathed and the central conceptual principle of his new cultural stance. In this, as in much else, his personal evolution mirrored a wider trend among many Germans in the aftermath of the economic crash of 1873.

Much has been written about the significance that the *Gründerzeit* and the onset of depression had for German anti-Semitism.⁶³ Only a few comments are needed here, as reminders of the broader context in which Wagnerism took shape and the opinions of Chamberlain were formed.

In the Reich Constitution of 1871, German Jews were finally given full equality after almost a century of continuous and fierce debate; the legal barriers which had been gradually lifted since the Napoleonic Wars were swept away entirely in the general climate of economic prosperity and rising expectations created by the boom of the 1860s. As R. Rürup has demonstrated, Jewish emancipation had by that time become linked to the wider development of a bourgeois-liberal society; it was one element in the larger program of liberal economic, political, and social reforms.⁶⁴ This protracted emancipation process also coincided with and facilitated a rapid transformation in the social position of German Jews who since the end of the eighteenth century had been progressively assimilated and integrated into German culture and society by the accelerated pace of modernization. Recent studies of educational attainments, urbanization, occupational concentration, and tax rolls illustrate clearly their dramatic rise in three generations from an underprivileged situation within a traditional society to a highly successful and largely middle class element within the emergent capitalist one. Their prominence in finance, commerce, textiles, and the professions as well as their increased representation in civic associations and in various areas of in-

tellectual life, was out of all proportion to their numbers within the population (500,000 or 1.25% in 1871) and symbolized the *embourgeoisement* of the Jewish community as a whole.⁶⁵

And yet, though Jewish economic integration and cultural assimilation were far advanced and Christian resistance to civic equality had subsided, the "Jewish question" had far from disappeared; and it was reopened within a few years in a flood of denunciations against alleged Jewish domination of German society. Part of the explanation for this reversal lies in the emancipation process itself. Owing to the political fragmentation of Central Europe there was never a single, circumscribed debate over Jewish rights, but rather a series of concurrent disputes occurring against a background of uneven, piecemeal change. For almost a century the issue was discussed by the press and parliaments of the separate states, which in many cases had the effect not of dismantling traditional prejudices among Christians but of hardening negative stereotypes and further enriching the common store of anti-Jewish arguments. Emancipation was always strongly contested and many Germans either remained opposed or accepted it only grudgingly in 1871. Even the liberals and the enlightened civil servants who championed full equality often defended their views not on the grounds of abstract rights of man or equal justice, but as a practical solution: only the elimination of legal disabilities, it was asserted, would allow the assimilation and reformation of Jewry. In short, to improve the Jew it was first necessary to abandon the special laws that defined and shaped his present existence. Opinions varied about the speed and scope of such legal changes, but the common denominator was that they ought to be linked to Jewish "civic betterment." Underlying emancipation was always a strong presumption that Jews would lose their separate group identity, and become no more than a denominational category; in fact, insofar as religion was never purely a private affair in Germany, it was often assumed that a solution to the "Jewish question" could only be achieved by eventual conversion. Finally, the slow and fragmentary nature of the emancipation process both helped to reinforce the habit of regarding Jews as lesser and inferior

citizens and to couple the controversy over Jewish rights firmly with the general debates over industrialization, liberal politics and economics, and the changing character of German society.⁶⁶

Had the new Reich enjoyed a period of continued prosperity, it is possible—although many historians raise serious doubts—that legal equality would have opened the door to social acceptance and gradually eroded the restraints that still blocked Jewish advancement in many spheres. As it happened, the sharp economic downswing, as we have seen, created widespread disillusionment and uneasiness. The crash and ensuing depression was interpreted as more than an economic crisis: it stimulated a collective appraisal of the spirit and goals of the new nation and fostered a repressive and vindictive mood. It was in this atmosphere of anti-liberalism and deep ambivalence toward modernity that anti-Semitism emerged as a significant political force. All the accumulated resentments built up during the emancipation debate now suddenly broke to the surface in an outcry against the Jew as symbolic of all that was judged corrosive and debased in German life. In these outbursts Jews were no longer represented as unqualified for equality because of their cultural or economic backwardness; rather, they were attacked as an excessively powerful minority who had gained control of society and subverted its traditional values. The slogan “emancipation *from* the Jews” became a common battlecry of conservative critics, those who felt penalized and uprooted by the functions of capitalism, and those searching for a scapegoat to explain the bewildering course of events.⁶⁷

The formative significance of these years in the shaping of modern German anti-Semitism is widely acknowledged. In vehemence and specious detail the exposés of Jewish swindling and political corruption crafted by Otto Glagau, Franz Perrot, Rudolf Meyer, and Wilhelm Marr—to name only the most important—constituted a new era in anti-Semitic journalism. Their analysis shifted back and forth from denunciations of individual Jews such as Bleichroeder and Strousberg (of Jewish descent) to a more generalized indictment of Jewry as an anti-thetical racial principle responsible for the corruption of German life. Their writings mark the first stage in the process by which anti-Semitism was detached from particular Jews

and became an integral part of an anti-liberal, anti-modern, and nationalist cultural stance. Their polemics also represent a new departure by virtue of the size of their readership and their appearance in eminently respectable press forums such as the formerly Liberal *Gartenlaube* and the Conservative *Kreuzzeitung*. Even more important, however, in endowing anti-Semitism with a certain social and intellectual respectability was the association with the cause of such university scholars as Paul de Lagarde and Heinrich von Treitschke, while the widely publicized speeches of court chaplain Adolf Stoecker, who sought to build a political coalition in Berlin on an anti-Jewish basis, also helped to create the impression that these new attacks were distinct from earlier and cruder forms of *Judenhass*.⁶⁸

In addition to this vigorous campaign against Jews, in print, one other development of these years deserves mention: the establishment of small, independent anti-Semitic parties which aimed to nullify Jewish emancipation and reestablish special restrictive laws. There were many of these groups, small in membership, underfinanced and deeply divided by personal rivalries among their leaders.* They were never capable of unifying into a national organization, but all subscribed, broadly speaking, to the demands of the Anti-Semitic Petition, circulated in 1880, which called for prohibition of further Jewish immigration, a census of Jews already in the country, and their exclusion from positions of governmental authority, teaching, and the judiciary. Characterized by its originator, Bernhard Förster, as a national plebiscite, the petition eventually obtained 225,000 signatures. For the most part the small anti-Semitic parties made a poor electoral showing. While they built a fairly durable political base in both Hesse and Saxony, and in 1881 mounted a forceful but unsuccessful campaign to challenge left liberal strength in Berlin, their progress was on balance fitful and the results poor until

* Among the most important were the *Christlich-Soziale Arbeiterpartei* (Adolf Stoecker); *Mitteldeutscher Bauernverein* (Otto Boeckel); the *Deutscher Volksverein* (Liebermann von Sonnenberg and Paul Förster); the *Soziale Reichspartei* (Ernst Henrici); *Deutsche Reformpartei* (Alexander Pinkert). For the most detailed analysis of them see: Richard S. Levy, *The Downfall of the Anti-Semitic Political Parties in Imperial Germany* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975). Still useful is Kurt Wawrzinek, *Die Entstehung des deutschen Anti-Semitismus 1873—1890* (Berlin, 1927).

1893.⁶⁹ These party activists moved in a different social world from men like Treitschke and Lagarde: the German bourgeoisie, even when sympathetic to their general outlook, abhorred their extremist rhetoric and populist character. But they were highly significant in developing new techniques of mass politics and demagogic propaganda and their local successes showed the potential of racist and anti-modernist ideology for mobilizing diverse *Mittelstand* groups.

It was, then, amid the turmoil of the decade after the *Gründerkrach*, that the Bayreuth cult took shape. Wagner's vision of national regeneration, his racist polemics in the *Bayreuther Blätter*, even the racial odyssey *Parsifal*, should be recognized as products of this time as well as being the outgrowth of his earlier Judeophobic writing and his growing despair over the failure of Germans to come to the aid of the debt-ridden festival. In these Wagnerite circles Chamberlain first became acquainted with the range and intensity of German anti-Semitism. It is also very possible that the particular circumstances of Dresden and Saxony played a role in the sudden intensification of Chamberlain's racism from the mid 1880s, for the state proved a very receptive ground for anti-Semitic organizers even though Jews made up only a minuscule portion (0.27%) of the population. Rapid industrialization caused widespread suffering among craftsmen and small businessmen and their mounting protest and demand for protective legislation frequently assumed anti-Semitic form. In addition, the Saxon government was particularly hostile to Jews, excluding them from civil service appointments, publishing its releases in blatantly anti-Semitic newspapers, and eventually prohibiting kosher slaughtering as a means of curbing the influx of orthodox *Ostjuden*. Not only did anti-Jewish feeling attain a high degree of respectability in the state, it also made political headway among the Saxon Conservatives and in the formation of small *Mittelstand* parties. Dresden, for example, was the birthplace of Alexander Pinkert's *Deutsche Reformpartei*, and in 1882 was host to the first international anti-Semitic conference, with delegates from Germany, Austria, and Hungary. Anti-Semitic *Reformvereine* sprang up in many Saxon towns in the 1880s, the most important being that in Leipzig whose leader, Theodor Fritsch, es-

published the newspaper *Anti-Semitische Correspondenz* in 1885 and rapidly became one of the most active anti-Jewish campaigners in the Imperial Reich. And though in general it is difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of such agitation, in Saxony some confirmation can be found in the results of the *Reichstag* elections of 1893 (the *annus mirabilis* of the independent anti-Semitic parties); the Saxon anti-Semites obtained 6 seats and 116,000 votes out of 16 seats and 263,000 votes achieved by such groups nationally.⁷⁰

There is no evidence to suggest that Chamberlain either supported or was particularly influenced by the activities of men like Pinkert and Fritsch. Indeed, it is very likely that he was offended by their brand of *radau-Antisemitismus* and rabble rousing, and found their political panaceas exceedingly simplistic when compared to the exalted Wagnerian goal of human regeneration. Such judgments certainly appear with some frequency in his letters during 1890, while in one instance in 1889 he reported ironically to Cosima that attendance at an anti-Semitic meeting left him "full of pity and love for all Jews."⁷¹ Wolzogen and other supporters of Bayreuth voiced similar sentiments, although Ludwig Schemann made contact with several of the anti-Semitic political leaders, including Fritsch. But, in spite of the rather snobbish disdain in Wolzogen's letters, he did advertise such journals as Pinkert's *Deutsche Reform*, Oswald Zimmermann's Dresden daily, the *Deutsche Wacht*, Otto Glagau's *Der Kulturkämpfer* and several others of like orientation as suitable reading for Wagnerites. Moreover, Zimmermann and Bernhard Förster were invited to write for the *Blätter* and Adolf Stoecker remained a friend of at least some Bayreuthians for many years. None of the leading anti-Semitic agitators appears to have been a member of the Dresden branch of the Wagner Association, however, but that is not surprising given its upper middle class composition and intellectual (rather than activist) bias.⁷²

Yet, if the relationship between Chamberlain's development and these political anti-Semitic groups remains obscure, it is clear that his four years in Dresden greatly intensified his opposition to Jews, and saw his adoption of a form of cultural criticism which ascribed all social ills to their malicious influence. Writing to Cosima from Berlin, which he saw as a fas-

cinating but terrible example of a town overrun by Jews, he wrote:

In front, behind and beside me—Jews! One of them who perhaps smells in me a business competitor, is constantly looking over my page. He must find the handwriting very unbusinesslike; perhaps he is astonished to see that in this house [the Central Hotel] someone should be writing from left to right.⁷³

Another example of his feelings is the letter he dispatched to Aunt Harriet after the death of Kaiser Frederick III in 1888. Chamberlain astonished his relatives by admitting his pleasure at the death of the Anglophile liberal ruler. In Germany, he insisted, “the *Jews only* have regretted the late emperor—along with some weak-minded liberal enthusiasts.” Claiming that Frederick’s reign would merely have augmented the already excessive power of the Jews, he explained:

For Germany it would have been no blessing to begin dabbling in liberalism; liberalism (so called) is adapted neither to the genius of the nation, nor to its momentary position between dangerous neighbours. And not only was Emperor Frederick inclined to that disastrous line of politics, but he was quite specially a Jewish liberal, and has been well nicknamed: “Der Juden Kaiser.” And in that he was diametrically opposed to what every intelligent and upright German feels—for the Germans are everyday awakening more and more to the fact that—in spite of their splendid position as an empire—they are menaced by a complete moral, intellectual, and material ruin if a strong reaction does not set in in time against the supremacy of the Jews, who feed upon them and suck out—at every grade of society—their very life blood.^{74*}



* This is the same uncompromising tone to be found in Wagner’s last essays; similar outbursts can also be discovered in the manifestoes and proclamations of master artisans and anti-Semitic politicians. The Wagnerite mood had much in common with the popular version of antimodernism, forged in the last two decades of the century. They were alike in their monarchism and patriotism, their attacks on classical liberalism and religiosity; similar, too, was their lack of clear social or political objectives. Wagner’s *Meistersinger*, with its celebration of Hans Sachs, the cobbler, and the culture fostered by the medieval guilds, was a particularly popular expression of this advocacy of artisanal values. This vaguely delineated Golden Age was the positive myth that linked Wagner’s aesthetic reformism with *Mittelstand* ideology of the 1890s; the negative myth was anti-Semitism.

It would be a mistake to exaggerate the extent to which Chamberlain was either concerned with politics or conceived of society's problems being soluble through political means. For in Dresden he was still primarily interested in art, and his hopes for cultural regeneration centered upon the aesthetic reform movement rather than the Reichstag or Bismarck's government. Sick and disheartened when he arrived in Dresden, with no immediate goals and aspirations, it can be seen how important Wagnerism was in his life during the next four years—it was a kind of aesthetic psychotherapy that provided him with a sense of participation in a significant cause, and allowed him to escape the depressing uncertainties of his health and to forget the interruption of his scientific research. At first he had embraced the pure aesthetic movement and, under the influence of Dujardin, immersed himself in the latest Symbolist literature from France. He studied the works of Huysmans, Jean Moréas, Baudelaire and Mallarmé, Gautier and Verlaine; and he became close friends with the poet Jules Laforgue, who resided in Berlin and was to die suddenly in 1887.⁷⁵ It was a literary education that few of the Wahnfried circle had, and Chamberlain always remained more sympathetic to the "moderns" than the other principal personalities around Cosima. Wagner's art, at this stage, seemed to Chamberlain to restore wholeness to divided modern man—psychologically it integrated passion and intellect just as artistically it united tone and word. A little later, as he moved closer to the Bayreuth circle itself, he saw in Wagner's art a means of welding together a new kind of national community, and he began to reject the decadent doctrines of art for art's sake. The social and religious mission of art now began to preoccupy him. At the very same time that Nietzsche warned that "one pays heavily for being one of Wagner's disciples," Chamberlain succumbed increasingly to that "Cagliostro of modernity."

When he was not occupying himself with the affairs of Bayreuth and the Wagner society, Chamberlain spent his time reading widely. He studied Wagner's dramas and prose writings and then delved into the legends and sagas on which they were based; he read the German and English Romantics, and was inspired by Schleiermacher's writings to make a thorough

study of the Greeks; he found a life-long companion in Carlyle, whose *Lebensphilosophie* was to find echoes in his writing later on. Then, under the influence of Cosima's letters and conversations, he made a careful study of Schopenhauer's philosophy, though he could never fully accept the intellectual juggling act which purported to reconcile Schopenhauer's theories on art and the underlying principle of *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Out of his contact with Schopenhauer, however, came deep interests in Oriental religion and literature, for which he began learning Sanskrit. He was captivated by the East as a mysterious and compelling alternative to contemporary western materialism; gradually, these interests in eastern religions were joined to racial theories about Indo-Aryan culture and then once again to the all-encompassing art of Wagner, who had himself referred to the *Ring* as "certainly the most characteristic work of the Aryan race." Finally, alongside all these other pursuits Chamberlain began a long study of Kant, Goethe and Plato, reading a little each day, thinking and contemplating about what he had read.⁷⁶

It was a full and busy existence. He became conscious of time in a new way and started to list meticulously in diaries all the reading he did, including newspapers and journals. And in this extensive reading schedule as much as in his changing views themselves one can perhaps detect acceptance of another German passion: the cult of *Bildung*, of which many historians have written. Chamberlain's course of study was designed to turn himself into the embodiment of the cultivated man, the well-formed and integrated personality; it was also a part of his general search for values, for a "new humanism" that would resist the corroding materialism and "steam intellect" of the present. But, in the practical realm, this veneration of *Kultur* and appeal to Idealism—so popular among the German bourgeoisie—meant a repudiation of politics and a separation of the realm of ideals and morals from the realm of power. Thus the counterside to *Bildung* was acquiescence to authority, to Bismarck and the *Obrigkeitsstaat*, and later, a justification of imperial ambitions on the grounds of cultural superiority.

Thus it was that Chamberlain could call himself a con-

servative "but not in the party sense of the word." For him Wagnerism and Idealism came before politics—and, to a large degree, shaped them. After expressing his satisfaction at the death of the liberal Kaiser Frederick III, he welcomed the accession of Wilhelm II—"the most intelligent, the most interesting face of the whole Hohenzollern family since the great Frederick." It was Wilhelm's genius that he was able to "unite in a really rare manner strength of character and practical insight into affairs with a really high idealism and appreciation of art" in contrast to his parents, "the apostles of 'industrial art' and similar beastliness." In politics his succession meant that Bismarck's hand "once more holds fast the reigns of government."⁷⁷

In art, Chamberlain hoped, it meant the era of Bayreuth. "We Wagnerians," he wrote (and Cosima was similarly jubilant in these months), "are happy to see on the throne of the mightiest empire a man who is a member of the *Allgemeine Wagner-Verein* and who in '86 at Bayreuth said to my young friends, ex-minister Puttkammer's sons: 'When I am Emperor it will be my business to see that this only home of German dramatic art does not perish.'"⁷⁸ Wilhelm did encourage military officers and members of his entourage to join the Wagner Association, and from time to time made high-sounding declarations of allegiance to Bayreuth. But eventually in this respect—as in so many others—Wilhelm was to be a disappointment, confining himself to a few festival visits and maintaining an air of official reserve. Yet, in 1888 Chamberlain envisioned royal support for the task of cultural regeneration: Wagnerism would help nurture a new unified German *Kulturstaat* and Judaism of the spirit would be expunged for good. This loosely related collection of ideas, emotions, and fantasies was both profoundly "unpolitical" and deeply illiberal. In such unguarded statements we see that the Genevan science graduate had been transformed into the Bayreuth publicist.

Chapter Three

First Years in Vienna (1889–1892)

BY THE SPRING of 1889 Chamberlain had largely recovered from his breakdown, and as his health and stamina returned he began to think again of resuming a career in science. He put aside plans for a French translation of Wagner's prose works which he had been toying with, and devoted his time to a study of Darwin, Huxley, and the scientific writings of Goethe. In 1881, when searching for a dissertation topic, he had been profoundly impressed by the botanical studies of Julius Wiesner; now, once again it was Wiesner's work which revived his enthusiasm for plant physiology. By the summer months he and Anna had decided to leave Dresden and settle in Vienna, which had an agreeable climate and many cultural attractions, and was also the home of Wiesner. Chamberlain's goal was to complete his doctorate within a year, and he began salvaging the results of his Genevan research. After a short holiday visiting the Paris exhibition, with Dujardin and Wyzewa, they travelled to Vienna.

It was cold and raining when they arrived in September, and the town seemed very foreign; but before long Chamberlain was welcomed into the circle of Viennese Wagnerites, whose leading figures he knew from the *Festspiele*. "The amiability, the pleasant sociability and real *Zuvorkommen* of the Viennese are quite unique," he told Aunt Harriet. "I had new proof of it yesterday when I was received with never-ending applause as the *berühmte* Herr 'Tschembelay'! by the one hundred and fifty most active members of the Akademischer

Wagner Verein." To Dujardin he praised the amiability of the inhabitants, admired "the pretty women of easy morals," and, after describing the picturesque setting of the town and its excellent university, concluded "I feel very comfortable in this medley of peoples and centuries." The one thing he found "frankly disagreeable," he admitted, was the "enormous quantity of Jews" but at least they kept to their own districts.¹

After searching for a month, Chamberlain found a large, quiet apartment at 1 Blumelgasse, in the Mariahilf quarter to the southwest of the town center, on a high floor overlooking the Esterhazy park. This flat was to be his home for the next two decades. He enrolled in the university at once and began attending lectures in the new neo-Renaissance building on the Ringstrasse, not far from the parliament. He quickly became acquainted with Wiesner, who later recorded his first impressions of this rather intense English student:

Regularly, after my lectures a smaller circle of listeners gathered around me, who wished to have a more detailed exposition of the subject of the lecture. Chamberlain soon appeared in this circle and I was immediately struck by the direct and felicitous manner he had of delivering his questions and remarks, testifying to his cultivation and knowledge. Often enough the conversation rapidly departed from the theme of the lecture and turned to other questions of philosophy and religion. These conversations were certainly among the most enjoyable and most stimulating which I have had in my life.²

For the first ten months after their arrival Chamberlain was hard at work trying to write a first draft of the thesis for submission to Wiesner. At first, in Geneva, he had devised a complicated series of experiments to document the movement of sap in plants; subsequently, in Dresden and Vienna, his interest turned more to the philosophical implications of the subject—in particular to the scientific debate between the proponents of vitalism and those who argued that there could be no understanding of the complex processes occurring in plants and animals until they were reduced to the principles of theoretical mechanics. Initially, under the influence of the extreme materialist Karl Vogt, Chamberlain's interest had been in the mechanics of sap movement; now, after several

years of reading Kant, Schopenhauer, and old Indian texts, along with recent scientific papers, he approached his subject from a broader, more philosophical and vitalist standpoint. With Wiesner's encouragement he began a serious study of the limits and nature of scientific explanation which led to the conviction that contemporary research in its stress upon mechanical and materialist reasoning, its blind faith in "pure empiricism," and its crusading zeal for the doctrines of evolution, was hopelessly confused and philosophically impoverished. "All the facts," he asserted, "which are advanced in support of the evolution doctrine allow themselves to signify something else; it only requires the right builder to arrive, who knows how to erect a new building with the same material."³ The immediate task, he insisted, was to admit that while causal and mechanical concepts enhanced our knowledge of physics and chemistry, they seriously impeded our grasp of biology and botany. What was needed was a new attention to scientific method, particularly in the life sciences. With this goal in mind, Chamberlain returned to eighteenth-century French writers like Bichat, Cuvier, Buffon, Lamarck, and Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, as well as to such Germans as Karl Ernst von Baer, Caspar Friedrich Wolff, and most importantly, the hitherto neglected scientific writings of Goethe.

As a result, Chamberlain's dissertation altered shape; his meticulous experimentation, instead of showing exactly how the sap moved in plants, became part of a larger negative proof of the existence of a life force (*élan vital*). Only by postulating a life force, he argued, could sap movements be understood; and this meant drastically revising the methods of science and recognizing the validity of a subjective, imaginative, almost artistic, insight into living things—akin to Goethe's "graphic vision" of nature (*Naturanschauung*). Although he was to achieve a widespread reputation as a Wagner publicist and popular race theorist, Chamberlain always regarded himself as a natural scientist as well. In later years he repeatedly returned to questions about the status and validity of scientific knowledge and, in his major works, greatly elaborated his critique of positivism and scientific materialism, striving always to integrate his ideas about science, religion, philosophy and

art into a coherent and unified system. Discussion of his views is best deferred until later: suffice it to say that the thesis on the sap, of no special consequence by itself, anticipated all his later scientific speculation and that its vitalist underpinnings were closely linked to the crystallization of his doctrine of race.⁴

By July 1890 Chamberlain managed to present Wiesner with a description of his experiments and the tentative conclusions he drew from them. On July 18 he jubilantly dashed off a card to Aunt Harriet announcing: "After studying my memorandum more carefully, [Wiesner] seems to consider my work really remarkable. He confirms my opinion that it is really *new*, that the results are unexpected and of great interest. . . . An early publication in some form or other [is] desirable. He strongly recommends my only publishing . . . the fully worked out and quite new part; the rest would form material enough for one or two more essays."⁵ In fact, these publication plans were premature: *Récherches sur la sève ascendante*, as the book was titled, did not appear until 1897—after another substantial revision. The reasons for the delay are difficult to unravel and although Chamberlain declared later that a recurrence of ill health and nervous disorders prevented once more the continuation of his scientific pursuits, his own letters and activities would seem to belie this conclusion. A more convincing explanation appears to be that his restless and dilettantish spirit felt too constrained by the specialization and professionalism botany required; other interests, particularly his time-consuming activities in the service of Wagnerism and growing journalistic ambitions had temporarily supplanted his scientific research. In the following years, his original goal of earning a doctorate receded: even when *Récherches* . . . was completed he decided against presenting it for a degree, since university requirements at Geneva mandated a broad oral exam that Chamberlain had no desire to prepare for.

In the summer of 1890, however, after submitting the fruits of his research to Wiesner, Chamberlain gave himself up to "an orgy of mountain climbing," spending his time on the limestone bastions of the Rexalpe and the Schneeberg, or trekking with his friend Adolphe Appia to the Kahlenberg Heights

and the Wienerwald. Then, at the end of August, the possibility of a more exciting journey arose. The Austrian government, as part of a wider campaign to publicize its administration of the protectorates of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and to encourage investment in and promote a wider understanding of the area, decided to sponsor a tour. Through acquaintances, possibly some of his Wagnerite friends, Chamberlain managed to secure an invitation, and set off with Anna early in September. "I am assured," he informed Dujardin on the eve of their departure, "that this almost unknown corner of Europe is is more in the middle ages and more oriental than Constantinople, Asia Minor or Egypt; in a few years this will no doubt disappear, but for the moment it is true."⁶

Although only about three weeks in duration, the journey was sufficient to kindle Chamberlain's enthusiasm, and he decided at once to arrange for a second and more extensive visit. Throughout the winter months he and Anna took intensive lessons in Serbo-Croatian and studied the history and geography of the region. The Austrian imperial finance minister, Benjamin von Kállay, who was in charge of Bosnian affairs, offered to meet the expenses of the second trip, provided Chamberlain agreed to publish some articles after his return; but the offer was declined. After several postponements, they finally left in May, travelling by horseback to the most remote parts of Bosnia. A keen photographer, Chamberlain took a large number of pictures, some of which were later published and others placed in an exhibition. The whole experience had a profound influence on him: here he met Catholic, Greek orthodox, and Moslem inhabitants—the latter, especially, who formed the aristocracy of the region, impressed him greatly.⁷

Years later, in 1917, in conversation with the Indologist Leopold von Schroeder, he recalled that Bosnia first made him really aware of the significance of race. Rudolf Kassner, the Austrian mystic who was for a time an admirer of Chamberlain, was shocked by his "*Schwarmerei*" for the Serbs of Bosnia, "those genuine, still almost pure Slavs," as they were described in the *Foundations*. From the "tallness of the men and the prevalence of fair hair," Chamberlain was convinced

they were close racial cousins of the Germans; they manifested none of the deterioration he associated with other Slavic types.⁸

On his return to Vienna at the end of September 1891, Chamberlain began writing articles about Bosnia and its customs. Already in the previous year, acting on the advice of Dujardin, he had written three brief essays of a political nature for the Paris *Figaro*: one on the coming significance of Canada, another on Kaiser Wilhelm II, and a third on modernization in Austria. Hastily done and inadequately researched, they were immediately refused by Francis Magnard, the editor. Flushed with enthusiasm after his first trip to Bosnia, he again tried his hand at political journalism, and sent off accounts of his travels to the *Standard*, *Morning Post*, and *Murray's Magazine* in England and wrote a feuilleton for the prestigious *Neue Freie Presse* of Vienna. All these essays were refused.

Chamberlain tried to explain his activities to Agénor Boissier, a wealthy Genevan friend who adopted an avuncular role toward him, "It is precisely," he told Boissier, who was perturbed by his excursions into the "mire" of journalism, "my family who have pushed me energetically to work at this trade." "One does not have to be an anti-Semite in the odious sense of the word," he added, "but it is at least true that all journalism is Jewish filth."⁹ In the face of his family's insistence he claimed to have little alternative but to carry out their wishes. Actually, Chamberlain's family letters would seem to indicate that it was his will not theirs which was behind his efforts, although there are signs that some of his relatives were critical of his leisured life and his failure to settle down in a profession or career.¹⁰

His earlier failures did not dissuade him from writing more essays after the second Bosnian tour. These were more successful: Boissier helped get one published in a prestigious Swiss review and three others were accepted by journals.¹¹ His intention was to arouse public support for Austrian policy in Bosnia since the occupation of the region in 1879, and more especially to praise the judicious administration of his friend Benjamin von Kállay. "As a bulwark against Russian or Serbian and, in general, against all Pan-Slavic covetousness,"

he wrote, the area was vital to Hapsburg interests. Even England should recognize its supreme importance: "The Russian," he told his aunt, "is our deadly enemy, and the enemy of all western civilization . . . our policy in regard to eastern Europe must be dictated by the clear knowledge of this fact." As a "moral outpost" against the Czars, Bosnia "could, from one day to the next, become one of the pivots on which all European politics will revolve"—words which proved only too true a little over two decades later.¹²

Chamberlain's view of Bosnia was markedly pro-government. Though uninteresting as analytical accounts of Austrian policy, these articles are significant in showing his growing regard for autocratic rule: Bosnia he argued was a working example of Wagner's illiberal ideal: "Absolute monarch—free people." Benjamin von Kállay was Plato's benevolent tyrant come to life, achieving more in ten years than representative institutions could have accomplished in half a century. "I really believe," Chamberlain wrote to his Serbo-Croatian language teacher, "that the Bosnians are at this moment the most fortunate *Volk* of the whole earth; they are still 'natural' men enough to feel free and healthy, and yet are already endowed with the best sign of civilization . . . no parliamentary regime! May God protect them from this for many years."¹³ Admiration for enlightened dictatorship in Bosnia coincided, as we shall see, with his growing hostility to representative institutions in Austria and Germany; gradually he was moving toward a belief in a vague corporatist system of government where an absolute monarch and trained bureaucracy ruled, advised by corporations of the separate elements of the nation:

The general credence is that Austrian bureaucracy is a somewhat rotten and irretrievably sluggish machinery. Be this as it may, the short history of the occupation of Bosnia suffices to show what an amount of talent and go-ahead administrators this empire disposes of, if only neutral ground can be found where party passions and national rivalries do not eat up the best of every man.¹⁴

Bosnia also raised other issues to which Chamberlain was sensitive as a Wagnerite: for example, the destruction of traditional patterns of life by modernization. The Bosnian was

Chamberlain's idea of 'natural man,' in contrast to the urbane, overcivilized bourgeois of industrial Vienna. Regretfully reflecting that Austrian domination would mean "westernization," he wrote:

He [the peasant] builds his house, he makes his shoes, and plough, etc.; the woman weaves and dyes the stuffs and cooks the food. When we have civilized these good people, when we have taken from them their beautiful costumes to be preserved in museums as objects of curiosity, when we have ruined their national industries that are so perfect and so primitive, when contact with us has destroyed the simplicity of their manner—then Bosnia will no longer be interesting to us.¹⁵

A few years later, again thinking of the Bosnian, he wrote:

The spirit of a natural man, who does everything and must create everything for himself in life, is decidedly more universal and more harmoniously developed than the spirit of an industrial worker whose whole life is occupied with the manufacture of a single object . . . and that only with the aid of a complicated machine, whose functioning is quite foreign to him. A similar degeneration is taking place among peasants: an American farmer in the Far West is today only a kind of subordinate engine driver. Also among us in Europe it becomes every day more impossible for a peasant to exist for agriculture must be carried on in 'large units'—the peasant consequently becomes increasingly like an industrial worker. His understanding dries up; there is no longer an interaction between his spirit and surrounding Nature.¹⁶

Chamberlain's pride in the technological and scientific prowess of the "German" nation was always mixed with despair at the consequences of migration to the cities, the commercialization of agriculture and the breakdown of peasant life.* Bosnia rein-

* In one of his plays, written in the 1890s, Chamberlain depicted the tragic lot of the peasant—subject to the hazards of weather and rapacious landlords, and with traditional values at odds with the urban, commercial ethos of the rest of society. A second play, set in Vienna, dealt with the themes of love, marriage, duty, and money: it portrays, among other things, the venality and superficiality of bourgeois life in the Austrian capital. Taken together they illustrate Chamberlain's critique of urban values and nostalgia for "natural man." See "Der Weinbauer" and "Antonie" in *Drei Bühnendichtungen* (Munich, Bruckmann: 1902). The first was unsuccessfully performed in Zurich in 1896, the second appears to have been staged by the Prague Stadttheater in 1906.

forced his *völkisch* nostalgia and bolstered the antidemocratic and racist outlook he had adopted in Dresden. Later, even he was a little embarrassed by the excessive sentimentality of these early articles and tried to persuade a somewhat skeptical Cosima that one of them was an intentional satire of "Jewish feuilleton style." But the lingering significance of these journeys is indicated by repeated references in later years.¹⁷

For more than a year Chamberlain's concerns had fluctuated between Bosnia, journalism, photography, and a growing range of activities associated with the Wagner Society of Vienna. Convinced that he was not cut out for a scientific career, his quick, eclectic mind shifted easily from one thing to another. A lively correspondence with Cosima attests to the breadth of his reading—Scott, Milton, Schopenhauer, Kleist, and a staggering array of other names fill the pages of their letters. A hasty note to Edouard Dujardin was equally typical of his catholic tastes: "Things go better with me. I am over my head in plant physiology, the philosophy of Anaxagoras, English language philology, the music of Gluck and the projects about the dramas in which I hope to collaborate with you." He lectured to the Photographic Society at the University; he allotted a portion of each day to Kant, Goethe or Schopenhauer; and he remained abreast of the latest cultural trends in France—the popular novelist Pierre Loti, the satirist Eugène Labiche and the cabaret singer Aristide Bruant (whom he had seen at the famous Le Chat Noir while visiting Montmartre in 1889) were just three of his favorites.¹⁸

He also busied himself with plans for books but at first had little success: when he tried to put pen to paper his ideas seemed feeble, flat and insignificant, at which he would hurl the results into a waste basket and dash out into the streets or a nearby coffeehouse. There was a feverish intensity even to Chamberlain's dilettantism; by the autumn of 1891 he had abandoned all hope of a scientific career; now he began to devote all his energies to Wagnerism, and it was service to Bayreuth that provided the necessary catalyst for his development as a writer.

It was as a favorite of Wahnfried that Chamberlain was

welcomed by the prominent Wagnerites of Vienna. Through Wagnerism he met music critics like Arthur Seidl and Gustav Schonäich, composers such as Anton Bruckner and Engelbert Humperdinck, and a range of literary and academic friends, among them the versatile philosopher and *littérateur*, Baron Christian von Ehrenfels. But, while Chamberlain's life mostly revolved around the Wagner societies, his closest and oldest friend during these first years at the Blumelgasse was the remarkable young stage designer Adolphe Appia whom he had known in Geneva. Their friendship deserves notice, not merely because of Appia's posthumous fame as one of the founders of modern stagecraft, but also because it reveals another, clearly defined side of Chamberlain's character; it shows him a solicitous and cultivated mentor to a younger disciple, for Appia was the first of several younger people whom he befriended.¹⁹

Their first encounter cannot be dated exactly: it was probably sometime in 1884 when Appia, a young music student at Leipzig University, returned to his home in Geneva for a vacation. Sharing deep interests in music and natural history (both had, for example, been at Bayreuth in 1882) their relationship quickly ripened into a deep friendship, and Appia was a constant visitor at Vert Pré. Seven years younger than Chamberlain, he was nervous and inhibited—the product of a strict Calvinist upbringing at the hands of a domineering father, a doctor, who disapproved of a musical career and wanted his son to study medicine. Walther Vollbach, Appia's most recent biographer, finds it odd “that two men so dissimilar in their outlook on most human and cultural affairs” should have been on such close terms, but this judgment derives from a series of misunderstandings. Chamberlain's views were not fixed from youth—he did not enter the world a full-blown fascist; his illiberal and anti-Semitic tendencies, far from being a personal aberration, were in conformity with the attitudes of large groups of contemporaries; anyway, the notion that no villain can enthrall or befriend the right-minded is a questionable assumption at best. The fact is that Appia was happier and, in the early days at least, more creative in the company of Chamberlain than when he was with anybody else.

They were indeed very different: Chamberlain, for all his underlying nervousness and sensitivity, presented to the out-

side world an air of confidence and aristocratic sociability; his engaging manners, brilliant conversational style, and polished affability were in striking contrast to the awkward, inarticulate Appia, plagued by a speech impediment. Whereas Chamberlain was an accomplished linguist—fluent in French, German, and English and capable of getting along in Italian, Spanish, Dutch, Norwegian, and Serbo-Croatian—Appia found it impossible to master foreign tongues. While Chamberlain's erudition was broad in the sciences and arts, the younger man was relatively unschooled and had large gaps in his knowledge.

Not surprisingly, Chamberlain became the dominant personality in the relationship—a mixture of an older brother and teacher. Appia was intellectually and emotionally very dependent on him, and yet Chamberlain never doubted the genius of his younger companion. Later, after their friendship had cooled, Appia still referred to him as "the ideal intermediary [who] gave to me with one hand, while he was willing to receive with the other." He added: "Lucky the young man who finds such a friend on his way."²⁰

When the Chamberlains moved to Dresden in 1886, Appia followed them and stayed for three years. Frequent conversations with Houston and Anna—of whom he was very fond—helped clarify and sharpen his early insights, and gradually his musical interests gave way to a fascination for the problems and techniques of stagecraft. Chamberlain's growing intimacy with the Bayreuth circle and local Wagnerites was also invaluable in obtaining permission for Appia to observe backstage the technical equipment not only of Dresden's Royal Opera House—the scene of Wagner's first performances of his dramas—but also the theaters at Bayreuth and Munich. Gradually, with Chamberlain's strong encouragement, Appia began to formulate an entirely new vision of stagecraft that would complete Wagner's synthesis of the arts. In 1882 and again in 1888 Bayreuth had disappointed him because of inadequate staging: "The most effective means of expression—light—without which there can be no depth is ignored. The drama which is all shadow and light, violent contrasts and infinite shades of meaning, is projected against a monotonous background."²¹

Well aware of the exceptional nature of Appia's talents, Chamberlain advised him on matters of prose style and expression, offered suggestions about his general reading, and explained difficult sources on the principles of electricity and magnetism, as well as helping with the interpretation of Wagner. From him, Appia gained in his own words "a pregnant and documented image of Wagner's personality, transfigured through the enthusiasm and adoration of a thoroughly informed artistic disciple."²²

As early as 1888 Chamberlain began mentioning his friend in letters to Cosima, hinting at Appia's ideas about the unity of music and light in the drama. That October he also passed on to Wahnfried some of his friend's thoughts about costumes and was pleased by Cosima's initial murmurs of approval. "What he says," she acknowledged, "is ingenious and correctly grasped," and she invited more details.²³ Chamberlain's secret hope that Cosima would allow Appia some role in the *Festspiele* came to nothing. The more she saw of these new proposals, the less she liked them, for her chief aim was strict traditionalism, to preserve Wagner's style of production by a constant ritual of repetition. Though conceding that more could be done with electric light than in the old gaslit days, Wahnfried remained obdurate in its refusal of Appia's spatial arrangements, his simplified costumes, and his use of shadow and movement.

Chamberlain was quietly persistent: when he visited Bayreuth in 1892 and 1893 he carried with him Appia's designs for the *Ring*; a little later, he counseled his friend to send another portfolio of sketches, along with a recently published pamphlet, "La mise en scène du drame Wagnérien." Other Wagnerites, including Wolzogen and Prince Hohenlohe-Langenburg, a close friend of Cosima, were also approached for their views, while in his biographical study of Wagner, published in 1895, Chamberlain footnoted some of Appia's ideas, predicting "that the next great advance in the drama will be . . . in the art of the eye, and not in music."²⁴ All the gentle coaxing and obvious hints met with firm rejection: "Appia does not seem to know," argued Cosima rather sharply, "that the *Ring* was produced here in 1876, and therefore there is nothing more to be discovered in the field of scenery and

production. Consequently, all that is right in his writing is superfluous since it is in accordance with the directions in the score, and all the rest is wrong to the point of childishness.”*

“All your concepts,” Chamberlain consoled Appia with a confusing piece of generational arithmetic, “are about 75 years ahead of their right time and the mother of the kind of people who will blaze with excitement at contact with your ideas, is still only a little girl who goes to school.”²⁵ The words were prophetic. For as long as Cosima lived Appia had no hope of participating at Bayreuth; indeed, it is a testament to her enormous influence that he was unable to translate his vision of the Wagnerian drama into practice on any stage for over a quarter of a century. Only after 1951 were his suggestions incorporated into the “new Bayreuth” style of Wagner’s grandsons. Chamberlain, alone of the Wahnfried circle, appreciated the revolution Appia pioneered, extending Wagner’s union of music and drama by integrating all visual aspects of the staged presentation with the musical forms.

After Chamberlain moved to Vienna, Appia often visited him for weeks and even months at a time and met prominent Wagnerites like Felix Weingartner, Arthur Seidl, and Siegmund von Hausegger. He felt less comfortable amid this broader circle of Chamberlain’s acquaintances and decided to return to Switzerland where between 1895 and 1897 (while Chamberlain worked on the *Foundations*), in seclusion at

* Another great figure in modern stage design received a similarly frosty reception. Gordon Craig describes lunching with Cosima in Dresden in 1905: “I always think it was rather wonderful that I met Frau Cosima Wagner that once, and had the honor of sitting at her right hand. I don’t know who else was there—two or three people. I didn’t realize much about that great lady in those days; all I realized was whether I felt well or not. And I felt very well that day, so I naturally talked a lot, and talked about the theater a lot. . . . I cannot remember much what we talked about at table, but I got quite excited talking about Wagner’s music, and I said to Frau Cosima that I could not see the stage trappings at Bayreuth or anywhere else were anything like the visions his music conjured up. And I think I remember her saying: “And what pictures do you see, Mr Craig?” And I described something like the wild pampas of South America, the rushing of the wind, perhaps a prairie fire, and so on.

When I looked at Frau Wagner I could hardly see her face, because she had turned the same color as the table cloth, into which she seemed to be vanishing. I came to a stop, thank goodness, in time—something shot me out into reality. By then everybody was getting up from the table, and before long I said goodbye to everybody, and to Frau Wagner, kissing her beautiful hand—“Gnadige Frau . . .” E. G. Craig, *Index to the Story of My Days. Some Memoirs of Edward Gordon Craig 1872–1907* (New York, 1957), p. 271–72.

Bière, he wrote his most important book, *La musique et la mise en scène*. Its progress is chronicled in voluminous and somewhat disjointed letters dashed off to his friend. The scores of chatty and impulsive letters from Appia elicited somewhat less frequent but warm responses from Chamberlain. Among other things, Chamberlain advised that the book be published in German—the language that dominated musical studies—and, when Appia hesitated, he agreed to supervise the translation. He also persuaded his Munich publisher, Bruckmann, to accept the manuscript and found time in 1898 to read and correct the first draft meticulously despite the heavy burdens of his own work. When it appeared in the following year, Appia's *Die Musik und die Inszenierung*, one of the outstanding texts of modern stagecraft, bore a dedication to Chamberlain "who alone knows the life which I enclose in these pages."²⁶

In later years, as Chamberlain became increasingly immersed in his personal mission as a publicist and cultural prophet, the two men saw less of each other and slowly drifted apart. Appia, in middle age, was no longer so emotionally dependent as he had once been; also, in Emil Jacques Dalcroze, the founder of eurhythmics, he discovered a new collaborator with whom he worked on several fine productions, culminating in Gluck's *Orpheus and Eurydice* in 1913. When in 1905 Chamberlain's marriage began to collapse and Anna grew sick and more of a burden than he wished to shoulder, he displaced some of his feelings of guilt in anger at Appia whom he accused of meddling and disloyalty. Yet, apart from several years silence after Chamberlain's divorce, their correspondence continued intermittently until 1924—by that time both had moved far apart in their political and artistic attitudes, although each clearly cherished the memories of a long friendship, once so intense and supportive.

In championing Appia at Bayreuth Chamberlain was mildly rebellious, but in all his other associations with Wahnfried he remained firmly orthodox and unreceptive to any criticism of Cosima. When he came to Vienna a Wagner fever was sweeping the town: among the students of the *Leseverein der deutschen Studenten* and the budding *literati* gathered in

the coffeehouses, and in the salons of the aristocracy and the wealthy bourgeoisie, Wagner's music and the amalgam of aesthetic and social philosophy that went with it was enjoying a remarkable vogue. The sensuality and startling psychological insights of the dramas, their mixture of pessimism and spiritual redemption, their alluring fragrance of sacrificial *Liebestod*, and even their difficulty (to master them required handbooks and a struggle) were all part of the composer's appeal. "I remember having been dominated by the Wagnerian idea," Romain Rolland once admitted, "when the Wagnerian art was still half obscure to me." The same was true of a good many Viennese enthusiasts; as Hermann Bahr commented, exaggerating only a little, many of the younger generation were ardent Wagnerites even before they had heard a single note of the music.²⁷

After Bayreuth, Vienna was the second center of the Wagner cult.²⁸ Not only did the town have the *Hofopera* (under the direction of Hans Richter and later Gustav Mahler), where fine productions of the dramas were regularly staged, but it also boasted the largest and wealthiest Wagner society, the Vienna *Akademischer Wagner-Verein*. With over 900 members, including prominent socialites, musicians, academics, and composers, it sponsored frequent meetings and concerts and collected sizable sums of money for Bayreuth, thereby obtaining some measure of influence over the actions of Cosima and the Wahnfried circle.

As was to be expected in a city so deeply torn by national and political tensions, the most serious differences among Viennese Wagnerites erupted over whether the *Verein* should associate itself with the radical Pan-Germanism of the student societies and Georg von Schoenerer. The majority of the Wagner Society were strongly opposed to any move that would intrude the factionalism of German nationalist politics into their cultural activities; many found the demagoguery and crude anti-Semitism of the Pan-Germans repulsive; others looked to art as a kind of personal religion—an escape from the futility of political and civic action, not an enticement to collective involvement. A vocal minority, however, insisted that Wagner's whole crusade for culture necessitated a firm en-

dorsement of the Pan-German ideology and its vigorous opposition to Jews and Slavs. The leader of the *Verein*, Alois Höfler—a teacher and later university professor—strove to avoid a rift, arguing that its sole concern should be art. But compromise proved impossible and in December 1889 the dissident group split off to form their own *Neuer Wagner-Verein*.²⁹

During his first year in Vienna Chamberlain regularly attended meetings and concerts but, largely occupied with his university studies for Wiesner, took little part in *Verein* "politics." At first he was unsympathetic to the political Wagnerites and deplored their dragging art through the swamp of everyday politics, but gradually his views altered, especially when the older society became more vocal in its criticism of Cosima. Her controversial staging of *Tannhäuser* at the 1891 festival and her efforts to gain greater control over the *Festspiele* funds, collected by the various local branches of the Wagner Society, provoked considerable dissatisfaction. Discontent increased further when she imperiously announced her decision to found a music school at Bayreuth and tried to gain control over the allotment of free festival seats (subsidized by the general fund) from the local societies.*

Chamberlain had no doubts about Cosima's judgment or authority, and he grew angry at those who questioned her actions. At first he tried to support Wahnfried on the inside: his letters to Cosima are full of *Verein* gossip and occasionally included caricatures of her opponents and parodies of their conversations. But he became steadily more hostile to Viktor Boller, a lawyer and leading organizer of the Vienna society, and by early 1892 explained to Hans von Wolzogen and

* Chamberlain's hope was that a substantial part of the Wagner Society funds would be used to purchase free seats for worthy Germans without financial means to attend the festival, thereby fulfilling the original wishes of the Master. He especially wanted to subsidize German schoolteachers who could have the largest possible impact on the younger generation. "If we want to preserve the sublime and sacred thoughts, strivings and art of our Master as more than something fashionable in the soul of the Volk, there is only one way: send hundreds and thousands of good German teachers to Bayreuth." He lobbied for this idea as a way to celebrate the proposed revival of the *Ring*, but when Cosima made clear her preference for a music school Chamberlain abandoned his plans and acted as her spokesman. HSC to Hans von Wolzogen Dec. 2, 1891; HSC to C. F. Glasenapp April 25, 1892 (CN).

Friedrich Glasenapp that he felt obliged to leave "this society of puffed up and impotent philistines" with their "completely negative immoderate, violent and destructive criticism of Bayreuth" and "their disgraceful treatment of Frau Wagner."³⁰

As the author of several articles on Wagner and a known confidant of Wahnfried, Chamberlain was asked in October 1891 to lecture at the *Neuer Verein*. His report to Cosima was wholly enthusiastic. "*For the very first time*," he wrote, "I was in a Wagner society where one could sense an eagerness, where something serious happened and where . . . the whole discussion concerned itself exclusively with the things which justify the very existence of a Wagner society." Though numerically small, it contained people "who approach our cause with a holy seriousness"—in contrast to the lax and negligent meetings of the *Akademischer Verein*, where newer composers and celebrated Jews like Gustav Mahler were regarded almost as highly as the Master himself. Subsequent evenings strengthened his first favorable impressions and, after a short delay arising from political tensions within its ranks, Chamberlain was formally admitted to the *Neuer Verein*. "If only," he remarked to Glasenapp, "we can succeed in restricting the all too passionate nationalism and the all too aggressive anti-Semitism within suitable limits so that the name of the Master shines over all and in everything—then something useful will come of it."³¹

Over the next years he became the leading figure of the society and exercised a strong influence over its program and evolution. Hard at work by that time on two books and numerous essays publicizing Bayreuth, he was in demand as a lecturer and began to try out his ideas on a variety of audiences, journeying, for example, to Graz to address the society dominated by Friedrich von Hausegger and Friedrich Hofmann, two fanatical anti-Semites and nationalists who had completely disrupted the sedate *Musikverein für Steiermark* some years before with their political activism. Outside the Wagner clubs he lectured to German audiences at the *Deutscher Jugendbund*, the student fraternity *Germania*, and the philosophical faculty of Vienna University. Fifty years later one listener still recalled how this tall, blond man sent "a

powerful wave of excitement flooding through the hall" and Chamberlain himself was surprised by his effectiveness as speaker and his ability to master his nervousness.³²

In this way Chamberlain's activities for the *Neuer Verein* brought him into *deutschnational* circles in Austria and introduced him to such Pan-German leaders as K. H. Wolf, the founder of the *Ostdeutsche Rundschau*, for whom he was soon writing articles. So completely is Chamberlain identified with the German Reich that it is easy to forget he wrote most of his major books and essays in Vienna. Spiritually he may have been more at home in Bayreuth and Germany, but he always acknowledged that the intellectual and political ferment of the Austrian capital (which Hitler would later call "the hardest though most thorough school of my life") gave powerful stimulus to his creativity. Viennese echoes reverberate through all his writing; he sat at home most of the day and his life was outwardly uneventful, but noises of the struggles outside floated up into his study on the Blumelgasse and shaped his ideas permanently. His passionate defense of everything German and exaggerated fears of political Catholicism, his obsession with social disintegration and focus on the instinctual rather than rational origins of human behavior all bore traces of his Viennese milieu.

Chamberlain had settled in the Hapsburg Empire at a time of rapid political change as new social groups, hitherto excluded from power—the peasantry, workers, artisans and Slavic peoples—successfully challenged the twenty year ascendancy of Austrian liberalism.³³ The sufferings of craftsmen and workers created by sharp economic fluctuations, tensions arising from large-scale immigration of Jews and Slavs from the east, and the resentments of nationalist Germans who witnessed the dwindling of their former monopoly of power in the empire converged to produce a general crisis which dissolved the old political order. In Vienna, a storm center of national and social conflict, the three movements that were to dominate the political future—Pan-Germanism, Social Democracy, and Christian Socialism—were already in existence by 1889, and

within a decade had shattered the parliamentary power of liberalism. Chamberlain had moved to the Austrian capital in time to witness its transition to mass politics. His diaries and letters point to a deepening concern with public issues. When liberals downplayed German nationalism as a disruptive force in a multinational society, Chamberlain viewed them as traitors. He sympathized with the discontents of artisans and small traders and their opposition to laissez-faire liberalism, but deplored the swift success of Karl Lueger's Christian Socialism among these strata. To him it signified a dangerous revival of the Catholic church's authority, disguised by a new demagogic and populist style. Similarly disturbing was Victor Adler's creation of a united movement out of the scattered elements of Austrian socialism. When Adler (himself an ardent Wagnerite) organized the first symbolic May Day parade in 1890, Chamberlain anticipated violence. To Aunt Harriet he reported: "People here seem to be rather frightened of the first of May. The late troubles, which you will have read of in the papers, cause real alarm. I suppose the rabble won't care to come up to a fifth floor flat, but I am having my revolvers cleaned so as to be able to furnish them with some digestive pills if they did."³⁴

Mixing almost exclusively with German Austrians, he shared their outlook, particularly their rancor against the demands of the radical Young Czechs for legal and cultural equality. Thus, in April 1897, when Count Badeni's speech ordinances placed Czech on an equal footing with German as a language of official use in Bohemia, his letters echoed the explosion of anger among the German population. Jubilantly he reported the demonstrations of students and respectable bourgeoisie in Vienna, Graz, and Salzburg, and applauded the patriotic feats of those like Dr. Karl Lecher, the Bohemian German leader, whose filibusters obstructed the business of parliament. "Everything that is German," he complained, "is systematically persecuted in this country, the object almost avowedly declared, being to obliterate the German element entirely."³⁵ Though at first alarmed by the abrasive, inflammatory style of Georg von Schoenerer, Chamberlain soon came to

value the Pan-Germans as the only group totally committed to the defense of German interests and culture in the empire.

In some respects, of course, Vienna merely reinforced tendencies already pronounced in Chamberlain's thought. Since leaving Geneva, as we have seen, he had rebelled against his Gladstonian liberal heritage. In place of bourgeois rationality, he affirmed instinct; in place of the liberal concept of progress, he asserted that the modern era was retrograde. Like many contemporaries he looked to art as a source of value and a means of restoring spiritual harmony to individuals atomized by social and economic evolution. Wagnerism symbolized this mood: in it aesthetic theory and cultural criticism were joined, offering a vague but deeply felt alternative to liberal ideals. One result was Chamberlain's growing attachment to a vision of *Volksgemeinschaft*, a perfectly integrated community foreshadowed in a remote, mythical past. Another consequence—intensified by the bitter class and ethnic conflicts of Vienna—was an increasing preoccupation with race and anti-Semitism, which became the cohesive and unifying element of Chamberlain's ideological repudiation of liberalism.

But, if Chamberlain's fascination with race had already been awakened in Dresden, the web of historical and racial theory that he began to spin around his cultural stance was entirely new, and there is no trace of it in his comments before the early 1890s. Several scholars have emphasized Chamberlain's debts as a race thinker to Gobineau, whose celebrated *Essai* he began to study around 1893 at Cosima's suggestion. It is true that he learned much from Gobineau and several other French authors, including Edouard Drumont, Edouard Schuré, Hippolyte Taine, and Emile Faguet. But Chamberlain did not contemplate these writers—nor other German and English ones—in isolation: he read with a critical eye, comparing and measuring their insights continually against his daily experience of the "racial" conflicts of Austria. Moreover, since he identified more closely with Hohenzollern Prussia than the polyglot Hapsburg realm which seemed to him to be slipping down the slope toward imminent disaster, Chamberlain repeatedly drew parallels between the fate of Germans in the

two states. Karl Kraus once called Vienna "the laboratory of the apocalypse;" for Chamberlain it was the scene of an ongoing racial experiment, an absorbing but destructive arena of physiological struggle, whose lessons its northern neighbors would do well to learn.

The details of Chamberlain's race theories are fully analyzed in a later chapter. His depiction of the emergence of modern European civilization was rich in resonances from contemporary Austria. Like Gobineau and most other racists, Chamberlain was fascinated by the demise of ancient Rome; its collapse under the assaults of the courageous Teutons formed a central element of his historical analysis. Centuries of miscegenation had sapped Rome's power, creating a mongrelized chaos of races incapable of true culture and unfit to carry forward the twin legacy of Graeco-Roman civilization and Christianity. While the northern Teutonic peoples struggled successfully against Roman decadence, constructing the vigorous nation states that had dominated subsequent history, the chaos retained the upper hand in southern Europe and the Hapsburg domains. For Chamberlain, the dynastic authority of the Hapsburgs was the historical successor to Rome, and he echoed Treitschke's belief that "Austrian Germanism" was "unspeakably corrupted by Semitism."³⁶ Witness, for example, the description of the anarchy of late Rome given in the *Foundations*:

The annihilation of that monstrosity, a State without a nation, of that empty form, of that soulless congeries of humanity, that union of mongrels bound together only by a community of taxes and superstitions, not by a common origin and a common heartbeat, of that crime which we have summed up in the definition "Chaos of Peoples"—that does not mean the falling darkness of night but the salvation of a great inheritance from unworthy hands, the dawn of a new day. Yet even to this hour we have not succeeded in purging our blood of all the poisons of that chaos. In wide domains the chaos ended by retaining the upper hand. Wherever the Teuton has not a sufficient majority physically to dominate the rest of the inhabitants by assimilation, as for instance, in the south, there the chaotic element asserted itself more and more.³⁷

The allusions to Austria in the passage are clear. In its language and images, in the piling of one descriptive phrase upon another at the outset of the statement, this passage seems modelled upon Pan-German polemics from the 1890s. At other times he referred more explicitly to contemporary Vienna, as in the following casual aside:

What the French call *un charme troublant*—superficial cleverness combined with a peculiar sort of beauty—is often characteristic of the half-caste; one can observe this daily at the present in cities like Vienna where people of all nations meet; but the peculiar unsteadiness, the small power of resistance, the want of character, in short the degeneracy of these people is equally marked.³⁸

The most striking contrast, in Chamberlain's view, was Prussia—a state bound together by ties of blood, where the government and institutions fostered "organic evolution." At Königgrätz in 1866, he argued: "the invincible strength of a noble race triumphed over racelessness and the moral power of a true nation conquered an agglomeration of territory . . . patched together by mere dynastic interest and lacking all unity." Bismarck's Prussia demonstrated "in what simple ways it is possible not merely to theorize about race . . . but to breed and preserve it."³⁹ Even Chamberlain's exaggerated Prussophilia echoed the tones of Pan-German speeches and broadsheets.

But Vienna not only encouraged Chamberlain to ponder more systematically the qualities and mission of the Germanic race, it also shaped and accentuated his conviction that the Jew was its historical antithesis. To be sure, his antipathy for Jews was already well developed before he arrived in the city, but he had never before lived in a place with such a large and conspicuous Jewish population. The figures—119,000 in 1890 or 8.7% of the total population—tell only part of the story, for Vienna's Jews were if anything more conspicuous than they were numerous. Their rise had been spectacular and their prominence in finance, newspapers, politics, the arts, and the professions was immediately evident—and appalling—to Chamberlain. Anti-Semitism pervaded Viennese life and

politics in the 1890s: one has only to read Schnitzler's *Professor Bernhardt* or his novel *Der Weg ins Freie* (*The Road into the Open*, 1907) to enter the morass of contemporary prejudice and the complicated responses of Jews. In an autobiographical jotting, Schnitzler reflected:

It was not possible, especially not for a Jew in public life, to ignore the fact that he was a Jew; nobody else was going to do so, not the Gentiles and even less the Jews. You had the choice of being counted as insensitive, obtrusive and fresh; or of being oversensitive, shy and suffering from feelings of persecution. And even if you managed somehow to conduct yourself so that nothing showed, it was impossible to remain completely untouched; say, for instance, a person may not remain unconcerned whose skin has been anaesthetized but has to watch, with his eyes open, how it is scratched with an unclean knife, even cut until the blood flows.⁴⁰

For Chamberlain the Jew was woven into the very texture of his image of Vienna. His earliest letters from the Blumelgasse record a growing obsession with their numbers and alleged power. When he heaped abuse upon Baring and Jewish financiers in a letter to Aunt Harriet, he could not resist a parting shot against "English sentimentalizing about the poor, persecuted Jews and speechifying about religious intolerance, just as if religion had anything to do with the matter." When in 1894 he visited a spa to cure his skin disorders and rheumatism, he complained: "Unfortunately, like everything else . . . it is fallen into the hands of Jews which includes two consequences: every individual is bled to the utmost and systematically, and there is neither order nor cleanliness."⁴¹ In the following year, when contemplating a move to Munich—for financial reasons mainly—he ranted:

However, we shall have to move soon anyway, for our house having been sold to a Jew . . . it will soon be impossible for decent people to live in it . . . Already the house being almost quite full of Jews, we have to live in a state of continual warfare with the vermin which is [sic] a constant and invariable follower of this chosen people even in the most well-to-do classes.⁴²

Further quotations are unnecessary. Sometimes he

focused on "Jewishness" in the abstract—a synonym for "liberalism" and all the aspects of modernity he loathed—and sometimes his invective was more pointed, aimed at *Ostjuden* immigrants or the Jewish press or financiers. At times he even held out Jewry as an example of a people who grasped instinctively the sacred principle of race and the importance of safeguarding its purity. Over the space of five years in Vienna, Chamberlain's prejudice became more vicious in tone and he began to formulate a racist world view whose driving force was the dialectic of German and Jew. His racial hostility became ever more systematic and intellectualized.⁴³ Finally, more even than in Dresden, he learned in Vienna the political effectiveness of anti-Semitism in mobilizing the anger and frustration of Germans. This was clear from the demagogic campaigns of Lueger and Schoenerer; it was also borne out by his own limited experiences as a lecturer before audiences of students and Wagnerites.

Chamberlain's early years in Vienna mark the end of the first stage of his life: one of false starts in his efforts to find a suitable career, a peripatetic education, and a growing identification with the cultural mission of Bayreuth. It was also a period of preparation, even if unconsciously, for his vocation as a publicist. To those who met him in his late thirties, Chamberlain seemed cosmopolitan, charming, cultivated, and generous to friends like Appia. His erudition was impressive: from years of reading in Dresden and Vienna he had acquired an encyclopedic, if ill-assimilated, knowledge of many subjects and both in Bayreuth and among friends in Vienna he inspired hopes of great achievements to come. His family in England, on the other hand, regarded him with some puzzlement and found his enthusiasm for Bayreuth a mystery. On a lengthy visit to England in October 1893, he found his relatives inquisitive but almost impossible to talk to. Expressing his mingled amusement and frustration to Cosima, he wrote: "The kinds of hair-raising questions that are put to me, you could not conceive; it is impossible. Nobody doubts that you have chosen Bayreuth because it is a 'center of traffic'; a standing question

is 'How much money do they make out of it'" Even Sir Neville Chamberlain, whom he had admired since childhood, referred to *Tannhäuser* as "the opera where there are a lot of girls at the beginning."⁴⁴

Despite several failed attempts at journalism and playwriting—his thespian talents were rather meager although three of his plays were later published—Chamberlain was nonetheless convinced by 1892 that his future was a literary one.⁴⁵ Later he recalled in characteristically dramatic terms the moment that realization swept over him:

In this my thirty-seventh year the writing demon [*Schreib-daemon*] seized my soul and gained power over me, so that I have never again been able to relinquish the pen. . . . On the morning of the nineteenth January 1892—I can still picture it as if it were yesterday—I was seized, as if from outside myself, by a spirit of resolution. The first command of this spirit was a mechanical one. I had never in my life written while standing up; now I picked up a small table and placed it upright on a small cupboard, which I then moved to a suitable place. Having built, in this way, an improvised standing-desk, I hastened to lock both doors so that nothing would disturb me at the magical work. I then approached this newly constructed desk, firmly resolved to write down everything that was going through my head—without questioning whether it was old or new, deep or shallow, well-expressed or trivial. Soon, the unexpected occurred: from the less good thoughts arose better ones, and from these better still. Before long—out of the writing and occasioned by it—brain-waves and ideas streamed forth on all sides, such as I had never before experienced. My vocation was revealed to me; or, more correctly, it had overpowered and taken possession of me.⁴⁶

Dujardin had for some time urged him to write a book about Wagner for French readers. He began work on it and wrote several sections in the form of lectures. At first he was content to see himself as a mediator or interpreter of Wagnerism for those unable to understand the dramas in their original language. But soon he decided to switch to German, for the audience that he wanted most to impress was in Central Europe. Progress was very rapid: he wrote easily and had a complete command of his subject. A young Wagnerite friend,

Rudolf Louis—a Jew as it happened—whom Chamberlain described to Wolzogen as “perhaps the most specifically philosophical brain I have ever met,” helped with stylistic revisions and the book appeared in July 1892.⁴⁷ *Das Drama Richard Wagners*, as it was called, was Chamberlain’s first book. It was a fine, lucid analysis of the development of Wagner’s dramatic ideas, and although it sold few copies it gave Chamberlain confidence to press on with other projects. Even before it appeared he was hard at work on other literary schemes and scarcely relaxed his taxing schedule over the next two decades. Reflecting often on how much time he had lost in finding his true vocation and fearing that his delicate health portended a short life, he acted like a man in a desperate hurry—eager to realize his own ambitions and to fulfill the high expectations of Wahnfried.



Part II



The Writer and His Public

As soon as I hold pen in hand I feel alive again and happy

—Chamberlain (1899)

The three pillars on which the structure of my spirit rests are: Science, Art, Religion

—Chamberlain (1919)

Englishmen may well be proud of a fellow countryman who is recognized in Germany as one of the most brilliant writers and profound thinkers of the day

—Lord Redesdale (January 1914)

Movement, for example, whose journal, *Der Kunstwart*, was edited by Ferdinand Avenarius), so did the social and political ideals expounded by Wagner in his rather turgid prose writings. But Bayreuth was a unique cultural experiment. It claimed that the Reich could be transformed from the stage outward through the artistic genius and philosophical doctrines of one man: the dramas were sacred works and Wagner an artist redeemer through whom coursed the true spirit of the *Volk*. No other movement for cultural reform carried self-inflation to such heights,* no other movement won so many ardent supporters or had a comparable impact on the myths and symbols of German nationalism.

From 1892 when the *Schreibdaemon* took possession of him, until 1896 when he began work on the *Foundations*, Chamberlain devoted his efforts to Bayreuth and the mission of cultural reform. His Wagnerian literary apprenticeship coincided with the dawning of a new era, as Bayreuth moved toward a wider popularization of its message.² The period of constructing the Wahnfried dogma was largely over; the shaky times following Wagner's death had been endured and the *Kreis* kept intact. In the 1890s the time was ripe for expansion; for intensifying the literary campaign and reaching out to embrace other *völkisch* groups professing related ideologies; for transforming the *Festspielhaus* from a great composer's mausoleum into a place of pilgrimage for all Germans who cherished the national mystique. In this process, it was Chamberlain who came to the fore: a stream of books, articles, and lectures flowed from his pen, reaching a far wider audience than Wolzogen's rather abstruse *Bayreuther Blätter* or Glase-napp's pedantic and specialized studies. Chamberlain, more

* Nietzsche returned continually to this theme, depicting Wagner as one who had transformed a desire for power into artistic creativity: "When the ruling idea of his [Wagner's] life—the idea that an incomparable amount of influence . . . could be exercised through the theater—seized hold of him, it threw his whole being into the most violent ferment. . . . this idea appeared at first . . . as an expression of his obscure personal will which longed insatiably for power and fame. Influence, incomparable influence—how? over whom?—that was from now on the question and quest that ceaselessly occupied his head and heart. He wanted to conquer and rule as no artist had done before, and if possible to attain with a single blow that tyrannical omnipotence for which his instincts obscurely craved." For Nietzsche Wagner was Napoleon as artist. Quoted from *Richard Wagner in Bayreuth* (1876) by R. J. Hollingdale, *Nietzsche, The Man and His Philosophy* (Baton Rouge, 1965) p. 129.

than anyone, fashioned the popular vision of Bayreuth and constructed the ideological bridge between Wagnerism and the mainstream of the Germanic ideology. His broad knowledge, easy, colorful style, and propagandist talents were remarkable.

To promote the festivals and publicize the Bayreuth Idea, Wahnfried supporters launched a multifaceted campaign to dominate contemporary writing on Wagner, collect prestigious and potentially helpful patrons, expand existing Wagnerite clubs, and safeguard Cosima's authority over the whole cult.

Convinced that while alive Wagner had been the victim of an insidious press campaign which "did all that fanaticism and malice could do to ruin Bayreuth," his supporters paid special attention to journalism. Chamberlain was among the most prolific, writing for a wide range of German, French, Dutch, and English periodicals as well as specialized musical reviews and mass circulation newspapers. His articles were carefully tailored to his readers—whether of such popular journals as Harden's *Zukunft*, the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, or Philadelphia's *Ladies Home Journal*, or the more explicitly political subscribers of the Pan-German *Ostdeutsche Rundschau* or the nationalist *Deutsche Zeitung*. The need for conscious restraint in his writing was sometimes wearisome. In 1896, after an especially active year, he conceded to Glasenapp that none of his more popular essays were completely frank expressions of his ideas "but rather a diplomatic or—better said—a tactical attempt through eloquence and conscious bias to pave the way to a better understanding and reception for the art and teachings of our Master." As for the publications themselves, he continued, "the *Börsencourier* and *Zukunft* are outspokenly Jewish papers; the *Redende Kunst* is gutter press [*Revolverblatt*], the Berlin *Deutsche Zeitung* is anti-Semitic of a Duehring stamp which says in its program that Wagner's art casts "a shadow" over Germany etc.—Nowhere can I find true expression." "Each of us," he concluded, "has his cross to carry; mine is perpetual self-renunciation, the suppression of what the inmost recesses of the heart feels."³ The same kind of dissembling was to be found in his public lectures, where he carefully modulated his anti-Semitism to suit different audiences.

Propagating Wagnerism not only meant publication, it also involved gathering recruits and patrons for the cause. Wahnfried carefully cultivated relations with the nobility and ruling families of Germany. Among those in some way associated with Wagnerism were the Grand Dukes of Mecklenburg-Schwerin and Anhalt; the Grand Duchesses of Baden and Oldenburg; and prominent public figures like Prince Philipp Eulenburg, Prince Ernst Hohenlohe-Langenburg; Prince William of Hesse-Darmstadt and Prince Max von Baden. The Wagner society of Berlin boasted the names of many of the capital's leading families, and though very few were close to the Wahnfried circle, their interest and concern for Bayreuth was of great significance to Cosima.

Wealthy industrialists were also courted for financial contributions, and here Chamberlain was able to use his influence with the Swiss millionaire Agénor Boissier, and later with his friend and patron August Ludowici, to obtain generous donations. Equally important were the efforts of Bayreuth to attract a widening circle of helpers from the ranks of German scholars, journalists, publishers, and intellectuals. The earliest generation of Bayreuth enthusiasts, especially the young Nietzsche and Heinrich von Stein, had been heavily criticized by academic colleagues for their *Wagner-Schwärmerei*; but despite such opposition Bayreuth remained eager for university recruits, who would lend to Wagnerism their academic prestige. By 1900 a considerable number of Wagner publicists held regular teaching posts—among them Wolfgang Golther, Max Koch, Leopold von Schroeder, Richard Sternfeld, and Henry Thode—while a great many other teachers and professors were regular participants in the meetings of the Wagner societies. When Chamberlain met someone who impressed him, he invariably tried to interest him in Bayreuth. Thus, he urged Wolzogen in 1893 to capture his young friend Rudolf Louis, a talented philosopher and aesthete, for the “*Zauberkreis*”; he did the same later in the case of Hermann Keyserling. And when Wolfgang Golther obtained a professorship of philology at Rostock, Chamberlain viewed it a success for Wagnerism:

Yes that is the victory of Bayreuth—or rather the foundation of the future victory of Bayreuth—that such men as you are becoming the recognized teachers of our *Volk* . . . We need now men of the first rank in all areas, men whose scholarly abilities can be denied by nobody. . . . pugnacious, subtle men: one position after another must be won.⁴

It was assumed that these apostles of Wagner would champion the cause in their professional activities. For many intellectuals, of course, Wagnerism was merely a passing fad, something they threw off in time; others proved impervious to Wahnfried's blandishments—even where their ideas paralleled those of Wagnerism in many respects, as was the case with Lagarde. Despite the efforts of both the theologian Franz Overbeck and Ludwig Schemann to attach this prophet of *Deutschtum* to Wahnfried, he proved deaf to all invitations to Bayreuth and requests for essays for the *Blätter*. But, if he evaded them in life, Bayreuthians appropriated Lagarde's spirit after death: he enjoyed a seat of special honor in the Wagnerite pantheon.⁵

The main activities of the Wagner cult in the towns of Central Europe revolved around the various branches of the Wagner association. By 1891 there were more than a hundred local groups with over 8,000 regular members, and their numbers expanded considerably during the next decade. In 1909, a *Richard Wagner-Verband deutscher Frauen* was founded to raise scholarship money for the festivals, though not until after World War I was a specifically Wagnerian youth Bund established.⁶ In between festivals these local societies sponsored lectures and discussion evenings, encouraged local performances of the music dramas, and tried to relate Wagnerism as a movement to the political, cultural, and social concerns of the day. It was here that the main publicists of the cult, like Chamberlain, came into direct contact with the wider public who were inquisitive, enthusiastic, or mildly supportive of the mission of Bayreuth.

In composition, influence within the cult, and even in their aims there were marked differences and local variations among these clubs. At one extreme there was the *Vienna*

Akademischer Wagner-Verein, a large body of over 900 members, by no means all of whom were convinced of the social and cultural prognoses that formed part of the Bayreuth Idea and were articulated regularly in the *Blätter*; at the other extreme was the small coterie of intellectuals who rallied to the club which Chamberlain and Dujardin founded in Paris (actually in 1884 this branch still had only 21 fully paid up members, 7 of whom were from Chamberlain's family!). The Berlin Wagner society was dominated by the rich and aristocratic families of the capital; the much smaller branches in provincial German towns had an entirely different class and occupational composition.⁷ Some societies, like the *Neuer Verein* in Vienna, were highly political; others, like the *Akademischer Verein* in the same city, tried to preserve an unpolitical stance. Most members of the clubs, however, were staunch German nationalists, and many were openly anti-Semitic. Furthermore, a great many Wagnerites were active in a wide variety of other organizations, such as the *Alldeutscher Verband*, the *Bodenreform* movement, various veterans groups, religious societies, and political parties. Hence the branches of the Wagner Association formed meeting points for many elements of the *völkisch* movement, and as such helped foster a sense of their close ideological and sentimental ties.⁸

Given these differences among the various Wagner societies, one might ask whether it is justifiable to speak of Wagnerism as a distinct ideology or cultural outlook. The frequent letters of Prince Hohenlohe-Langenburg to Cosima Wagner, for example, reveal a conservative and racist mind very different in tone and style from Ludwig Schemann or the *völkisch* Pan-Germans in Vienna with whom Chamberlain spent so much time. Georg Meurer, who wrote for the extreme racist journal *Hammer*, bore little trace of intellectual similarity to that versatile student of Brentano, Baron Christian von Ehrenfels, who befriended Chamberlain. And yet all were, at least for a time, firm Wagnerians.⁹ Even within the more select ranks of Bayreuth publicists there were differing shades of religious, racial, and political views. Thus, it is with some caution that we speak of a Bayreuth outlook, indicating the

areas of accord and the points of disagreement within the Wahnfried circle.

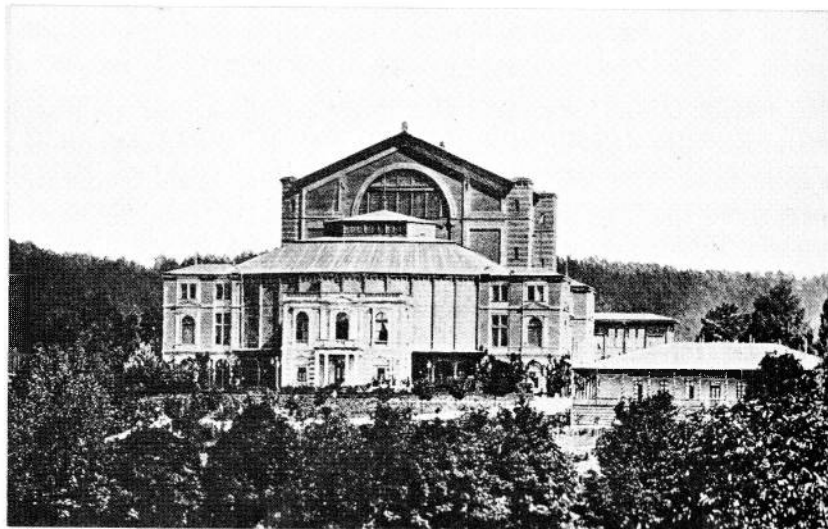
Through Chamberlain's writings, however, the main contours of "The Bayreuth Idea" are discernible. Until 1896 he was the willing instrument of Cosima's wishes, conferring with her over his essays and books, and championing her authority over the cult. He placed before the Central European public what the *Manchester Guardian* once called "the official and authorized pronouncement of the inmost circle of Wagner's friends and relatives."¹⁰ As his views developed, differences were to arise which cooled somewhat his relations to Wahnfried, but eventually it was Bayreuth that largely conformed to Chamberlain's viewpoint rather than the other way round. Meantime, before 1896 he showed himself the "perfect Wagnerite," explaining Wagner's music and ideas, defending the actions of Wahnfried, and entering the lists against all critics of the cult: his activities provide an excellent picture of a Bayreuth publicist.



No visitor to the Bayreuth *Festspiele* could escape the deeply religious atmosphere encouraged by Cosima and her closest supporters. The *völkisch* professor W. H. Riehl accurately perceived the way the exaltation of culture led, in some degree, to the substitution of art for religion and the deification of Wagner. "The inmost, hard core of Wagner's party," he wrote, "is more than a party, it is simultaneously a congregation which believes in its Messiah and listens to his revelations with the devotedness of believers. The veneration for his person and work grows to a cult, his books are seen as a confessional writings, the outward symbols of the new, aesthetic faith."¹¹ Believing themselves the vanguard of a cultural and spiritual crusade, the Wahnfried circle exhibited in their writings and correspondences a degree of self-



Haus Wahnfried 1876



Bayreuth Festspielhaus, 1900

righteousness, dogmatism, and emotionalism difficult for the historian to recapture. Letters between members of the inner "charmed circle" [*Zauberkreis*], as Chamberlain once called it, overflowed with dedication, camaraderie, and a distinct note of paranoia about the rest of society. Wagner and his widow were regarded as semi-divine, while the leaders of the cult fantasied themselves as Grail knights, guardians of the sacred cup; their prose was laden with the words "duty" and "selflessness"; their actions and interrelationships at moments evinced an unhealthy quality of masochism and self-abasement. Chamberlain once confessed to Siegfried Wagner: "If it benefited Bayreuth, I would without hesitation let myself be roasted over a slow fire."¹²

The core of the Bayreuth gospel was an intense personality cult of Wagner. The Master of Bayreuth had helped initiate this mythopoeia himself in his carefully written autobiography, *Mein Leben*. Though it remained unpublished until 1911 (by which time, of course, many of his enemies were dead and unable to question its contents) Wagner's "confession" provided well-drawn guidelines for his widow and her close supporters. In the decades after the Master's death, the Wahnfried circle exercised a vigilant watch over relevant new publications and collected and edited his letters—deleting, obfuscating, and distorting those episodes of his career which failed to conform with the vision of an ideal artist-redeemer they wished to create. Wagner emerged as a secularized saint, misunderstood and maligned by contemporaries. He was the incarnation of "selflessness" and "purely human" values, "a brave and noble knight" fearlessly striving for mankind's ennoblement. He was the aesthetic genius of whom Schiller dreamed; the culmination of German musical and poetic traditions; a tone poet whose intuitive *Anschauung* seized upon the deep religious and moral strivings of the *Volk* and gave them mythic and symbolic expression in his dramas.

The writings of Chamberlain are excellent exemplars of Bayreuth hagiography, especially his handsomely illustrated *Richard Wagner*, which was published by Bruckmann in 1895. When he first received Bruckmann's request for such a book, Chamberlain had dutifully sought Cosima's advice on whether

he should accept. In fact, it had been Cosima who had secretly arranged the whole thing and her choice of Chamberlain, rather than Henry Thode or one of the other literary Wagnerites, was a special mark of esteem.¹³ Cosima was eager that a colorful, well-written account of Wagner's life and the "Bayreuth Idea" should appear; Glasenapp's monumental life was far too long and factual to obtain any popular readership, and now the expanding cult needed a new synthesis. Wolzogen, Glasenapp, and Heinrich von Stein were Chamberlain's main sources, and his goal, as he explained to Aunt Harriet, was to grasp intuitively the "individuality" of Wagner, to strip away the accidental and outer layers of detail and depict the "inward and spiritual man."¹⁴ In consequence, Chamberlain treated the details of Wagner's life only briefly and sometimes very elusively; more attention was given to the composer's position within the broad tradition of Teutonic art, although here too Chamberlain's approach resulted in a very static and nonevolutionary interpretation—an ahistorical view of Wagner characteristic of the Bayreuth circle.

Chamberlain nevertheless took great care over the brief biographical sketch in the book—and not merely out of deference to Wahnfried. A part of the cult's "idealization" of Wagner was to protect his memory from the taint of criticism. For Bayreuth art was a moral force, elevating and ennobling the audience—it could scarcely issue from anything but a faultless, unblemished personal life. If the good life did not always produce great art, at least great art had to be inspired by a noble personality.

The defender's task was not easy, for Wagner had been a man of large appetites and little restraint. He had lived the romantic artist's life; he had spurned conventions, acting out the dreams and repressed desires of the bourgeois in a genteel, inhibited, and eminently civilized age. Others obeyed the rules, or pretended to do so; but Wagner had lived high on unpaid debts, mixed with royalty, taken part in a revolution, and lived openly with another man's wife—all the while he was creating some of the greatest music of the century. His ego-worship was inordinate and notorious; his victims were many. Yet, while contemporaries found his behavior shameless and outrageous,

they could not help being fascinated by it, nor could they resist the subconscious appeal of his art.

Neither Chamberlain nor Wahnfried, of course, acknowledged any of this. Wagner's life had to be interpreted and explained in the light of his old age, when conservatism, morality, and religion were the watchwords of Bayreuth. There were a number of delicate aspects of Wagner's career which a biographer had to address. One was the question of paternity, a problem which had troubled the composer and which was raised by a number of his critics. Was Wagner's father the police actuary Friedrich Wagner or his actor friend Ludwig Geyer? In his first postscript to *The Wagner Case*, Nietzsche had claimed that his father was Geyer, a fact Wagner had concealed, because it was very likely that Geyer was a Jew. Chamberlain preferred to avoid the issue and merely alluded that Geyer "was in every respect worthy of the warm friendship Friedrich Wagner had felt for him." In a letter to his English translator he was more straightforward, asserting that Wagner's mother had been "a delightful, modest, pure woman, bred up in a pious family"—not for a moment, he added, could he believe "she could have behaved like a mere strumpet."¹⁵

More complicated were the Master's own marital entanglements, and here Chamberlain needed all his skill to thread the difficult path of Bayreuth orthodoxy. Wagner's abandonment of his first wife, Minna, his adulterous relationship with Mathilde Wesendonck, and his fathering of children with Cosima Bülow before she was separated from her husband, let alone divorced, was all public knowledge. Chamberlain's strategy was simple: he praised Minna as a limited but well-meaning woman, ignored Mathilde almost completely (to her intense annoyance), and implied—by careful juxtaposition of sentences rather than by direct statement—that Wagner had turned to Cosima only after the death of his first wife in 1866. Cosima's role in the estrangement of Wagner and King Ludwig was omitted, and no mention was made of Hans von Bülow. A vague reference to narrow bourgeois moralism was included, followed quickly by the assertion that Cosima had by her actions obeyed a "higher duty," a "holy duty," and the commandment of "a higher power."¹⁶

There were other irksome criticisms hurled at Wagner: his large debts and penchant for luxury were frequently spoken of, so too was his alleged exploitation of the emotions of his young, unbalanced patron, King Ludwig. Nor had the volume of accusations decreased to any extent since Wagner's death. Chamberlain's explanation—and that of Bayreuth—for this continuous scandal-mongering was that a press conspiracy existed whose goal was to destroy Bayreuth and defame Wagner. The Bayreuth circle was convinced that, at every step of Wagner's career, Jews had tried to block his path. The composer Meyerbeer for example, was alleged to have done his best to see that Wagner's works were not performed. This claim, made by Glasenapp and reiterated by Chamberlain and other supporters of the cult, prompted considerable controversy in musical journals.¹⁷ More damaging than the individual malice of Meyerbeer, was, in Chamberlain's words, "the poisonous daily bilge dished out by the Jewish press" which Germans uncritically consumed. "I can think of no greater spiritual poison, which enhances more the progressive 'materializing' ['Judaizing'] of German families, than the majority of today's popular newspapers." Wagner's famous enemy, Eduard Hanslick, the critic for the *Neue Freie Presse* of Vienna, was viewed as the commanding general of a press campaign which continually injured Bayreuth "by alternately pouring ridicule upon it, then smothering it in silence."¹⁸

If the scandals of Wagner's private life could be attributed to the fabrications of a hostile press, his public actions and his politics were not so easily explained. Wagner had participated actively in the Dresden revolution of May 1849 and as a result spent almost fifteen years in exile. Whereas modern Wagner scholars have distinguished at least two distinct periods of his life—a liberal one coinciding with the era of democratic nationalism in Europe in the 1840s, and a later reactionary period—the Bayreuth "orthodoxy" insisted that he had been consistent throughout. Those, like Hugo Dinger, who denied this were rapidly expelled from the cult. The political and social vision of Bayreuth was that of Wagner's final years, and the idea that he had once been a republican, hand in hand with Bakunin and the revolutionaries, was intolerable. Echo-

ing Wagner's tone of injured innocence in *Mein Leben*, Bayreuth publicists rejected all evidence of his complicity: he was a revolutionary of the spirit, not a political insurgent.¹⁹

It was in the interpretation of Wagner's politics that Chamberlain, active in the highly politicized Wagnerite circles of Vienna, went far beyond earlier writers like Glasenapp. His writings were timely because they coincided with the wider popularization of the cult and efforts to relate its mission to other *völkisch* groups. Indeed, when Chamberlain first lectured on the subject before the Wagner society of Graz, the local police feared demonstrations and demanded that they be able to check the contents of the speech in advance.²⁰ The main task Chamberlain set himself was to disassociate Wagner from the taint of republicanism, communism, and political demagoguery without condemning outright the popular nationalist movement of 1848. Though Wagner was a fervent German nationalist who had advocated unification of the German states long before that became a political reality, Chamberlain claimed he had never been in the vanguard of the revolution. His actions had been those of an artist visionary, an unpolitical man, rather than a political agitator like his friend, August Roeckel.

Wagner, wrote Chamberlain, was stirred by an awareness of the materialism and mammonism of the age; he saw "that society was standing on the verge of a mighty crisis, and that effective and thoroughgoing aid must be sought, not in politics but in regeneration." There were two pieces of evidence for Wagner's complicity in the revolution: a speech he addressed to the *Vaterlandsverein* of Dresden in June 1848 and police claims that he had mounted the barricades in the insurrection of May 1849. Chamberlain dismissed the flimsy evidence of active intervention in the May uprising and turned to the *Vaterlandsverein* speech, in which Wagner had urged the Saxon king to be "the first and truest of all republicans" and called for sweeping social reforms. Chamberlain completely reinterpreted the speech, insisting that Wagner had valiantly remained outside party politics, and had sought to galvanize king and people behind the moral and religious goal of cultural rebirth. The only way forward, in Wagner eyes, had not been

via constitutionalism and parliamentary majorities, but by an alliance of "absolute monarchy" and "free Volk"—for, Chamberlain argued, only when monarchy was absolute and unchecked in its power by democratic assemblies could a people enjoy true "inner freedom." Democracy, for Wagner, was a "foreign un-German" idea, impeding spiritual transfiguration. At Chamberlain's hands Wagner's proposals, including his call for the acquisition of overseas colonies and a measure of popular participation in politics and social reforms, were refashioned into a *völkisch* German creed with close affinities to the Pan-German nationalism of the Second Reich. "This one man," he concluded, "has done more to spread the German language, German feeling and thought, throughout the whole world than all the statesmen, generals, and politicians of the century put together."²¹

Cosima was delighted with Chamberlain's rescue of the early Wagner's political reputation, especially since in 1892, the year before the Graz lecture, two books had appeared which presented a very different interpretation of the Dresden uprising. One of these was by Hugo Dinger, whom Chamberlain attacked in his lectures for claiming that Wagner had been a communist revolutionary associated with Bakunin. The other author was Ferdinand Praeger, a piano teacher who met the Master in London in 1855 and subsequently became a friend and correspondent. Before he died in 1891, Praeger had written a book of recollections about Wagner, entitled *Wagner as I Knew Him*, which Lord Dysart, a leading figure of the London Wagner Society, had published in English and German in the following year.²²

The Praeger affair, in which Chamberlain was the foremost champion of Cosima and the chief spokesman for Wahnfried, shows the fanatical zeal with which the Bayreuthians defended their orthodoxy. Praeger's book dealt mostly with the early career of the composer, contravening all the most sensitive aspects of the Bayreuth "gospel." To the delight of Hanslick and other critics of Wagner, the work deplored Wagner's sybaritism and his vehement anti-Semitism, claimed that he had deliberately concealed the degree of his political involvement in 1849 and, most unforgivable of all, implied that the

Master had badly mistreated his first wife, Minna. Such a book, which soon gained widespread publicity, was guaranteed a vituperative response from Bayreuth.

The campaign against Praeger began during the *Festspiele* of 1892, led by Chamberlain and William Ashton Ellis, an Englishman who later translated all Wagner's prose works. Ellis, the editor of *Meister*, the journal of the London Wagner Society, was already at odds with Lord Dysart. On comparing the English and German versions of Praeger's book, Chamberlain and Ellis found several discrepancies between the two. Also, many points in the book seemed suspicious: some of Wagner's letters quoted by Praeger did not resemble the Master's style of writing, while in several cases the chronology appeared fallacious. Finally, given the fact that Wagner and Praeger were never really close friends, it seemed questionable that he could have been privy to some of the information now published.

All these objections to the book were woven together by Chamberlain into a devastating critique for the *Bayreuther Blätter*. This was sufficient to discredit it among most Wagnerites, but Wahnfried was still troubled by its success with the general reading public.²³ For this reason Chamberlain decided to follow up his critique toward the end of 1893, when he made one of his rare visits to England. Using well-placed family connections he managed to gain entry to Lord Dysart's private archive, where the original Praeger letters were housed. Ashton Ellis had been refused permission in the previous year, but Chamberlain took advantage of Dysart's absence abroad to prevail upon his employees. Implying that he wanted the letters for his own private information, not for any specific purpose of publication, Chamberlain scrutinized and transcribed 20 out of the 34 letters cited in the Praeger book; the rest were missing. Returning to Vienna he wrote another blistering attack for the *Blätter* reproducing the original letters and exposing Praeger's distortions.²⁴

Chamberlain's first article, which he had proudly sent to Cosima as a Christmas present, had aroused widespread attention. "Bismarck's paper, the *Hamburger Nachrichten*," he told Aunt Harriet, "had a long 'feuilleton' on it last week (five

columns) in which the critic says 'Ch's Kritik ist an sich eine *geradezu klassische Leistung*'"²⁵ The second essay produced an immediate response from the publishers of the German edition, who announced publicly their thanks to Chamberlain for having revealed the defects of the book, and at once withdrew it from publication.²⁶ Chamberlain was overjoyed at his success. In England, however, the book had not been withdrawn and Ashton Ellis set about chronicling every error and misrepresentation in its pages, causing Dysart further discomfort, and occupying column after column in the *Musical Standard* for months on end. Dysart resigned from the London society which gradually dissolved under the strain of these internal divisions. The debate grew increasingly bitter, as Praeger's widow claimed that Bayreuth was out to destroy her husband's memory because he had favored Minna over Cosima; Dysart, who had suffered considerable monetary loss as well as public embarrassment, began to fight back, threatening suit against Chamberlain, and then issuing warnings of a different kind. He announced he would publicly disclose the whole affair, and the manner in which Chamberlain had obtained his evidence, and also spoke of publishing certain other letters "recently discovered, also possibly letters of what I understand are of a very offensive nature, which I think certain persons whose names I do not care at present to mention, will not care to see the light." He was almost certainly referring to correspondence concerning Wagner's first marriage, which Cosima would not want to be placed before the public.²⁷

By this time the affair was becoming a burden for Chamberlain and Bayreuth. Praeger had been discredited and further prolongation of the dispute could only sully the name of Wagner. Dysart continued to insist that Chamberlain had made inaccurate copies of the letters and that "every single word in the book from beginning to end is absolutely true." Bayreuth answered by reproducing Chamberlain's two articles in book form with a separate introduction by Wolzogen. It was a victory for Wahnfried, but Praeger's assertions contained too much truth to be easily forgotten. Even as late as 1908 Chamberlain still found it necessary to publish a second edition of his critique, with the explanation that "There are still people

who repeat Hanslick's old lie that Praeger's book was bought up by me, and talk of Praeger as an impartial and trustworthy witness."²⁸

It is unclear why Praeger should have written so flawed a book. It did contain serious errors of fact and chronology, some of them, admittedly, arising out of problems of translation. Ernest Newman was puzzled by the whole affair and wondered whether "the author of it is not to be regarded as a diseased rather than a criminal type." Yet this distorted account of an unbalanced man who wanted to write himself into history was in many respects closer to the truth than the Wahnfried mythology—and this is what made it so dangerous. The explanation eventually adopted by Chamberlain and the Bayreuth circle for Praeger's actions was characteristic of their conspiratorial outlook: Praeger was a Jew, trying to get revenge for Wagner's outspoken anti-Semitism. Though Wolzogen preferred to play down the "Jewish" aspects of the affair at the beginning, anti-Semitism had become the central issue by 1894. Chamberlain warned of Praeger's book: "It does not stand alone, but is a symptom; the disposition of mind from which this symptom springs is everywhere around us, waiting only for a favorable opportunity to besmirch the honor of the German Master in the future as it has done in the past."²⁹

The Praeger controversy indicates the lengths to which Bayreuth zealots were prepared to go in their defense of Wahnfried's Wagner, a national hero untainted by personal vice or political perfidy. Especially interesting is the alacrity with which Wagnerite journalists joined the fray on Chamberlain's side. Theodor Antropp was active at the Pan-German *Ost-deutsche Rundschau*, so was the fanatical Dresden Wagnerite August Püringer; Oskar Bie supported Chamberlain in the *Allgemeine Musikzeitung*; the radical anti-Semitic *Deutsche Wacht* and the *Deutsche Zeitung* publicized the dispute, while Chamberlain's friend, Theodor de Wyzewa, backed Wahnfried in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*.³⁰ They did not rest until the book was removed from print. In addition, the affair made Cosima more aware than ever of the enormous talents of Chamberlain as a publicist. By 1895 he had become the foremost popularizer of the cult.

Another task of Bayreuth publicists was to demonstrate the importance of the *Festspiele* for German national culture and also to interpret the dramas in accord with Wagnerian "orthodoxy." The problems facing Cosima in 1883 were enormous: the festival was deep in debt and few music lovers were prepared to make the long and relatively expensive pilgrimage to this remote Franconian town. Even those who considered themselves Wagnerites, Chamberlain once reflected sadly, occasionally voiced the opinion that the whole festival should be moved to Munich or some other accessible large urban center. In addition to Bayreuth's geographical inconvenience, there was the rivalry of well-funded state operatic companies (like the one in Munich under the leadership of Ernst von Possart) which were capable of excellent performances. By skillful negotiations with the Bavarian government Wahnfried was able to keep exclusive control of *Parsifal*, but the other dramas were frequently staged before large and enthusiastic audiences. Finally, it was argued by many critics that the *Festspielhaus* had been established for the *Ring* and *Parsifal*, and that Wagner's earlier works were quite different and were designed for all opera houses, not merely Bayreuth.³¹

If Bayreuth were to survive, it had to counter each of these objections. Thus, it was emphasized in all Wahnfried-inspired literature that the *Festspielhaus* was a "sacred place," a shrine of Germanism. Its performances were not merely "model" productions which could be imitated elsewhere; they were intrinsically different, offering "a living symbol of German idealism," "an ideal world within the real one." Remote from densely populated and industrial areas, the festival transported the audience into a world which was the negation of modern materialist and cosmopolitan civilization. In large cities art acted as a mere diversion from worldly cares; in Bayreuth it aimed to be an inspiration for life. Those attending were drawn into the drama as in a religious celebration, "a communal rite to remove the votary from the pressures of space and time, from the pain and corruption of modern life."³² "These works," wrote Chamberlain, "are a moral power in our century; in them a hidden power 'of German being' comes forth from the light; they lead us away from the frivolity

of the modern theater and with holy fervor transport us into the depths of our own being."³³

Völkisch art required not only a rustic, *völkisch* setting but also a popular German audience. With this in mind Wagner had hoped to support his national theater by patronage and public subscription, allowing free places to be awarded to the deserving, and freeing the festival from ordinary social and commercial conditions of theatrical enterprise. The attempt to raise sufficient subscriptions failed, but the ideal remained important to Wahnfried. Chamberlain was especially active in trying to raise money for "free place" scholarships—although no Wagnerite could fail to perceive the growing embourgeoisement of the festival, which by 1900 was a social occasion, dominated by the famous and wealthy. Through the symbolism of the drama, it was argued, the *Mythos*, or eternal Germanic truth, was carried to the people. As Chamberlain's close friend Leopold von Schroeder wrote in a book which gave Wahnfried great pleasure: "For the first time since the dispersion of the Aryan peoples, they can, once more, congregate at a predetermined place . . . to witness their primeval mysteries." "Bayreuth," he added, "has become through Wagner the ideal center of the Aryan peoples and Germany and the Germans have thereby been assured immeasurable pre-eminence as the appointed guardians of this consecrated place where the wonder of the Grail is revealed."³⁴ Schroeder's prose was more torrid than most, but all Bayreuth publicists shrouded the cultic rites in an air of mystery. The "Bayreuth Idea," Chamberlain insisted, defied verbal description or logical analysis; to be understood it had to be absorbed, ingested, at first hand.

But what of the claim that only Wagner's last dramas were suited to the Bayreuth stage? Clearly, if the festival were to succeed it had to include in its repertoire all the Master's works—not just the *Ring* and *Parsifal*. Thus, a major part of Chamberlain's activity as a publicist was devoted to showing that all Wagner's dramas and writings were perfectly compatible parts of a single unified vision of art and life—that his artistic development from the earliest work, *Die Feen*, until the last, *Parsifal*, was a series of closely linked stages in the evolution of the Word-Tone-Drama, "a new, more perfect form

of drama, fully answering to the requirements of the Germans."³⁵ Both Chamberlain's first book, *Das Drama Richard Wagners* (1892), and his larger biographical study three years later were of major importance in presenting concisely and eloquently the Wahnfried contention that all the dramas belonged to Bayreuth, and that only there could they be seen and heard as originally intended.

It was not easy to fit all Wagner's artworks and writings into one consistent theory. The Master had toyed with several philosophical and aesthetic theories, and though his goal was always cultural regeneration, his hope of realizing it shifted from politics to art, and finally to religion. At one moment he professed himself a follower of Feuerbach, and at another a firm adherent of Schopenhauer. Such earlier writings as *The Artwork of the Future* (1849) and *Opera and Drama* (1851) called for a reunification of the separate art forms into a new equal synthesis—the re-creation on a higher plane of the Greek tragedy, where dramatization of myth had taken the form of a communal religious celebration of life. Each art, he reasoned, could only reach its fulfillment in union with the others. Not long after, under the powerful influence of Schopenhauer's aesthetics, Wagner underwent a change of heart, tacitly accepting music as the supreme art which alone could explore the depths out of which emotions arose, communicating otherwise inexpressible feelings, and merging the individual soul with the underlying force of the universe. But though he changed his ideas about the relationship of the arts, Wagner never admitted it; he never repudiated his earlier theories. Uneasy about his own contradictions, he tried in later essays like *Beethoven* (1870) and *The Destiny of the Opera* (1871) to make his theories compatible, but succeeded only in further muddying the waters for his subsequent interpreters.³⁶

If Wagner believed in the unity of his artistic theory and practice, Bayreuthians could scarcely contradict him. The dilemma was simple: either Wagner had not clearly understood the theories of those like Schopenhauer whom he professed to follow, or his dramas derived from more than one aesthetic conception—in which case it was arguable that not all of them were intended for or suited to Bayreuth. In the face of these

difficulties, Chamberlain's explanations were understandably confused and vague. He relied largely on the early essay *Opera and Drama*, and viewed Wagner as a Word-Tone-Poet who had created an organic relationship between words and music, combining the advances made by Shakespeare in poetic drama with those made by Beethoven in musical expression to forge a new synthesis. Wagner's own inconsistencies, not surprisingly, reappeared in Chamberlain's exegesis. He shifted ground constantly, at times arguing that music was the only art form which could evoke the timeless, spaceless realm of religion or arouse the most profound feelings of the *Volk*, and on other occasions flatly insisting that no one art was preeminent. The same kind of prevarication prevailed in Chamberlain's discussion of Wagner's debts to philosophers. Thus, in *Richard Wagner* he both acknowledged that the Master had built upon the rock of Schopenhauer's philosophy and declared that Schopenhauerian pessimism was completely incompatible with the Wagnerian doctrine of aesthetic redemption! But, if his arguments were tortuous, Chamberlain's conclusion was firm: all Wagner's works grew out of the same aesthetic vision, and represented the culmination of "Germanic" poetry and music.³⁷

It was not enough for Chamberlain and other Wahnfried supporters to contend that the festivals were intrinsically different from all other operatic performances, they had also to support their claim in extensive reviews of the performances themselves. In this respect, too, Chamberlain was active, providing newspapers and journals with descriptions and analyses of the *Festspiele*. Cosima's task had been a difficult one: in 1883, as Chamberlain recalled, every performance was like a requiem, and it was not until 1886 that the festival again came under a single strong hand. Beginning in 1886, Cosima sought to demonstrate that Bayreuth was a necessity for all Wagner's works and began expanding the repertoire, starting with imitations of Wagner's Munich productions of *Die Meistersinger* and *Tristan und Isolde*. Her first major challenge came in 1891, with the decision to stage *Tannhäuser*, a costly and difficult drama which the Master had never staged satisfactorily himself and which had been produced by every major opera

company in Germany. As Wagner's best-known work it was the supreme test for Bayreuth's contention that the festivals were essential for all the dramas. Cosima admitted to George Davidsohn, the sympathetic editor of the *Berliner Börsenkurier*: "I knew we had set ourselves the Bayreuth task *par excellence*."³⁸

Cosima's *Tannhäuser* was a great success, although it also aroused considerable criticism. Chamberlain was in the forefront of her public defenders, declaring in later years that this festival was a turning point separating the real Bayreuthians from the general mass of Wagner enthusiasts. "This year," he wrote in the *Bayreuther Blätter*, "Bayreuth has brought us a drama which we have hitherto not had. . . . this drama has revealed to many of us what Bayreuth is, what Bayreuth aims for, and what Bayreuth can achieve." In a published letter to a French music critic, Paul Flat, who had doubted that Wagner would have attempted to dramatize *Tannhäuser* in this way, Chamberlain explained that only lack of money had prevented the Master from executing such a plan in 1880. Now, for the first time since 1845, it had been properly performed. "The fate of Bayreuth," Chamberlain assured Flat, "lies in the hand of one person, and this hand carries out what the Master had wished." Equally lavish was Chamberlain's praise when, three years later, Cosima consolidated her achievement with a new version of *Lohengrin*. In an early essay in *Revue Wagnérienne* Chamberlain had dismissed this particular work as that "of a moment of feebleness, of discouragement, of doubt." Now it had been transformed by the Bayreuth style into a masterpiece.³⁹

By 1896 the Bayreuth tradition was established. Chamberlain had played a major role in the expansion of the cult, and was closer to Wahnfried than perhaps any of the other leading Wagnerites with the exception of Wolzogen. In the weeks of the festival he was in his element, attending banquets for the artists, receptions at Wahnfried, strategy meetings with delegates from the Wagner societies, and enjoying reunions with friends and acquaintances from all over Europe. Romain Rolland, who attended the *Festspiele* that year, recalled: "I got myself introduced to H. S. Chamberlain. Very tall, blond,

lean, still young, about 35 years in appearance, moustache and blond beard. . . . the air of a professor at the Ecole de Chartes, not yet tired and very enthusiastic about his work."⁴⁰ (It was actually the last year Chamberlain would devote exclusively to his work as a Bayreuth publicist, for he soon became too burdened by the *Foundations* and other books to give as much time and energy to the cause.)

It was not surprising that Cosima asked him to write the official history of the first two decades of Bayreuth. Chamberlain was honored by the request, but felt a little disturbed (he admitted to Wolzogen) when she dispatched quite a detailed "skeleton sketch" outlining exactly what was required in the essay. The finished essay completely satisfied the High Priestess, capturing precisely the mood she desired: it carefully recalled the years of hardship and heroic struggle; the empty rows of seats in 1884; the selfless devotion of the few, and the growing triumph under Cosima's leadership. Ending with a clarion call to the faithful to redouble their efforts, Chamberlain prophesied a broader task ahead, that of inspiring the whole German nation with the ideals of Bayreuth.⁴¹

Apart from his history of the festivals, Chamberlain also crowned his efforts in 1896 with a spate of reviews and articles on Cosima's new version of the *Ring* cycle, staged for the first time in twenty years. These reviews were typical examples of Bayreuth propaganda. The major theme was the success of the "Bayreuth style" inaugurated by Cosima. In 1892 one of Wagner's chief ambitions had been realized with the establishment, under the direction of Julius Knieke, of a Bayreuth music school which would train artists specifically for Wagnerian roles. Chamberlain had been very active in trying to raise money for the school, and he saw the *Ring* festival as a vindication of all these efforts. In the first, third, and fifth cycles of the *Ring* the roles of Siegfried and Brünnhilde were played by internationally famous operatic stars, Wilhelm Grüning and Lilli Lehmann. In other performances, Alois Burgstaller, a graduate of the Bayreuth school, and Ellen Gulbranson, another unknown prodigy of Cosima's, undertook the parts. For Chamberlain the result was "an incontestable victory of the Bayreuth school" and "one of the most important stages

on the path towards discovering a new German style for the new German drama." He was especially bitter in his criticism of Lilli Lehmann, both because she was a Jew and because Cosima had developed an intense dislike for the singer. "The cooperation of this operatic prima donna," wrote Chamberlain, "was the one painfully disturbing thing in an otherwise unforgettably harmonious overall impression. . . . the one really dark shadow."⁴² Lehmann, who had been one of Wagner's original Rhine maidens, commented angrily: "Many roads lead to Rome, but to the Bayreuth of today only one, that of slavish subjection." "The *Ring*," she added, "was here quite dislocated in the very place that was its home."⁴³ With its carefully prearranged gestures and movements in strict subservience to dramatic form, Cosima's new style eliminated all spontaneity and improvisation by individual artists: it reproduced on stage the same kind of subordination and subservience to the Bayreuth dogma as existed in other aspects of the cult.

In his presentation of Wagner's ideas and his analysis of how they should be carried out, Chamberlain was the loyal disciple of Cosima. But in one area, that of lighting and scenic design, he opposed her conservatism and tried to convince her to adopt the radical new theories of Adolphe Appia. The more Cosima became acquainted with Appia's proposals, however, the less she liked them. Though conceding that thanks to electric power more could be done with lighting than in Wagner's day, she flatly objected to Appia's spatial arrangements, his simplified costumes, and his use of shadow and movement.⁴⁴ Bowing to Cosima's preferences in public at least, Chamberlain was content to use conventional illustrations and sketches in his *Richard Wagner*; in his journalism too he remained the complete disciple: "the exact knowledge which [Cosima] has of every part of the tone poem, of every note, of every particular in the costumes and of every gesture and movement in the acting, is simply incomprehensible. She watches over everything herself."

"That Frau Wagner came to believe that she had a kind of divine mission," the conductor Felix Weingartner reflected many years later, "was less tragic than that nobody had the

courage to point out to this woman . . . that even a highly gifted person undertaking a new and unaccustomed task makes pardonable, comprehensible, and natural mistakes."⁴⁵

While Chamberlain looked back happily over the first twenty years of the festival, Weingartner surveyed them critically. In a spirited attack in 1896 he ridiculed the dogmatism of Wahnfried, the servility of Cosima's supporters, and the fanaticism directed to all who could not accept the Wagnerian "commandments."⁴⁶ But to say that a man like Chamberlain was subservient to Cosima, while true, gives only a part of the picture. For, as their correspondence shows, his was a loyalty and a willing subordination of self, rooted in deep friendship and reverence. He embraced the views of Wahnfried so completely that they became—for a time at least—his own, and he was extremely indignant when critics claimed that his books were nothing more than summaries of Cosima's ideas. For Chamberlain the theatrical ritual of Bayreuth was a key to understanding the world in which he lived and a national religion which could transform it. "What constitutes the cultural significance of Bayreuth," he reflected in 1919, "is the fact that here a 'pinnacle of humanity' [*Gipfel der Menschheit*] lived among us and created and gave immortal form to his thoughts; in this way the teaching, which otherwise exists everywhere as mere theory, becomes an experienced doctrine; for in the *Festspiele* . . . an example is raised up corporeally before our eyes."⁴⁷ The teaching was that of *völkisch* nationalism and Germanic Christianity. It is to an analysis of the "Bayreuth Idea," to use an expression coined by Nietzsche and then appropriated by Chamberlain, that we now turn.



At the heart of the Bayreuth world-view lay the concept of spiritual regeneration. In an important article in the *Bayreuther Blätter* in 1895, and also in his biography of Wagner,